

# MARI

Capital of Northern Mesopotamia  
in the Third Millennium

The archaeology of Tell Hariri on the Euphrates



Jean-Claude Margueron

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IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BC

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on the Euphrates*

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*Front cover:* Reconstruction of the third millennium circular city of Mari in the Euphrates river valley, showing the exterior defensive dike-rampart and the interior rampart, the canal linking the city to the river, the main irrigation canal (to the left) and the navigation canal (to the right). © Nicolas Bresch and Jean-Claude Margueron.

*This book is dedicated to the people of Syria  
and to their archaeological and cultural heritage*





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# Preface

After more than 70 years of field research and more than 40 excavation campaigns, it is time to present a new synthesis – some 40 years after that of André Parrot – of the results obtained in the exploration of one of the great sites of the Near East. It is also time that such a work be published in English.

The evidence shows that there was not one city of Mari, but three successive cities, each having specific features, although there is a striking permanence in the original forms. The first, City I, founded in about 2950 BC, was based on remarkable principles of city planning, including a broad regional development with the creation of canals for irrigation and transport, one more than 120 km long. In the twenty-third century BC it was replaced by City II, which was itself founded using impressive technology in the city planning. Probably destroyed by Naram-Sin of Akkad about 2200 BC, it was entirely reconstructed – City III – by a new dynasty called the *Shakkanakku*. In the nineteenth century BC this was replaced by an Amorite dynasty, which ruled until Mari was destroyed by Hammurabi of Babylon in 1760 BC.

The diversity of the information and the material that has been recovered confirms Mari as one of the best sources for understanding the brilliant Mesopotamian civilisation that developed between the beginning of the third and the end of the first millennium BC. In the very first campaign, the excavation of the temple of Ishtar produced a superb collection of statues of the middle of the third millennium (the statue of Ebih-II is one example), a collection that has been constantly enriched by the campaigns that followed, in particular by the excavation of the temple of Ninni-zaza. With the second campaign and the discovery of the palace of the Amorite dynasty of the beginning of the eighteenth century BC, recovery began of a rich collection of tablets, the palace archives of the last sovereigns that illustrate the everyday activity of the palace, the administrative management and the relations with other kingdoms. From the same palace come several statues of exceptional quality (in particular the statues of the Goddess of the Flowing Waters and of the king Ishtup-Illum), as well as evidence for mural paintings, the like of which has not been found in any other building – the decoration of the Courtyard

of the Palm Tree, the Painting of the Investiture and the friezes of the reception hall of the apartments of the king; thus was revealed the unexpected existence of great mural painting equal to that of Egypt.

The importance of Mari also lies in its monumental architecture – its large palaces of the third millennium and of the beginning of the second, its temples and sacred terraces. The degree of preservation of its ruins permitted a new approach to Near Eastern architecture which demonstrated the conceptual ingenuity, the rationality of the architectural decisions and the technical knowledge of the architects and builders. Thanks to Mari, Mesopotamian architecture, in spite of the very ordinary nature of its basic material – mud brick – could no longer be considered the poor relation of the great civilisations of Antiquity.

The extraordinary strength of Mesopotamian civilisation was not understood in the first years of exploration. It was thought that the city was only a product of slow maturation and a simple extension of the villages of the Neolithic. Mari clearly revealed that the city was not simply derived from a village, but that it was the product of a new concept. This concept perceived the city as a complex assemblage, whole from the time of foundation, with a defined shape (in this case circular) designed to favour the channelling of rainwater and the organisation of an infrastructure to ensure the stability of the constructions and the street network. This was a sophisticated system developed in a systematic way, an urban plan designed to ensure the security of the urban community against bad weather and against enemies, adapted to a naturally hostile environment which it was necessary to remodel to a great extent.

Today, the ancient city of Mari again faces destruction because of war. I wish to add my voice to all who deplore the present conflict in Syria and its devastating effects on the lives of Syrians and on their archaeological and cultural heritage. This heritage under threat very sadly includes Mari and other sites that have provided so much precious information on the ancient history of the Near East. May the information they still hold not be lost to us.

Jean-Claude Margueron  
January 2014

# Acknowledgments

This work sums up our knowledge of Mari after some 70 years of excavations and research. André Parrot, who discovered the site, first included the author in his team in 1954 and then passed on to him in 1979 the responsibilities of director of the excavations, assumed until 2004. The generosity of André Parrot has enabled the author to devote his entire life to the study of Mesopotamian civilisation and to one of its very first cities.

My thanks naturally go to the French archaeological authorities who have since 1969 financed all the excavation operations that I have carried out in the Near East (including Larsa, Emar, Faq'ous, Ugarit), as well as those carried out by André Parrot. Thanks in equal part go to the Syrian authorities who did everything possible to enable the development of research on Mari through the facilities accorded to the excavators.

I will always remember what I owe to my friends and comrades on the excavations who have worked so hard for the success of our projects. I cannot name them all as they are so numerous, but they know that they are intimately associated with the results of our research as they are presented here.

A first version of this text appeared in French in the columns of the *Supplément du Dictionnaire de la Bible*. The director of this publication, Madame Florence Letouzey, authorised me to use this version as a basis for the English translation, for which I thank her warmly. I have revised and added to this version.

Finally, my gratitude goes to Elizabeth Willcox, who with tenacity and thanks to her linguistic capabilities carried out the translation of the original text into English, as well as its preparation for publication.

---

# I. Presentation of the site

Mari is the name of the city that existed from 2950 BC to 1760 BC whose vestiges correspond to the site of Tell Hariri, situated in the valley of the Syrian Euphrates a dozen kilometres from the modern town of Abu Kemal, at the frontier between Syria and Iraq. Discovered when a fragmentary statue was found in the summer of 1933, the site has been excavated continuously since December of that year. By the end of 2008, 45 campaigns had been carried out.

## The tell (fig. 1)

Before the beginning of the excavations, Tell Hariri appeared as a group of hills of different sizes, clearly organised in a concentric manner. In the centre is the main mound, roughly semi-circular in shape, its northern edge formed by a straight line 1100 m in length; to the west and south, a line of mounds forms a very regular, narrow and continuous circular layout, except at its southern end, where there is an enlargement towards the south; two or three small mounds lie in the west between the main tell and the circular line of mounds. In its largest dimensions, this group of tells extends 1.3 km from north-west to south-east, and 1 km from north-east to south-west. The highest point is situated on the main mound, but not in the centre, and lies 14.50 m above the plain; it overlooks the whole of the site as well as the left and right banks of the river as far as the plateau of the Jezirah (on the left bank) and that of the Shamiyé (on the right bank). The excavations carried out since 1933 have drastically modified the original topography; the excavated areas, except in cases of restoration, are becoming filled in, and large accumulations of debris have clogged wide areas. Thus the present topography has only a vague resemblance to that first seen by André Parrot. In the studies which follow, analyses are based on the topographical drawing

made by the architect Paul François during the first excavation campaign, this being the record that is closest to the original condition of the site.

## The environment

### *The situation of Mari within the Near East (fig. 2)*

The location of Mari at the edge of the lands traditionally defined as Mesopotamia has rendered its belonging to the Syrian or the Mesopotamian sphere a matter of debate; this is in fact a false problem, as in ancient times such distinctions were not made, and the Euphrates valley in its regional diversity presents one large unit which may be thought of as Syro-Mesopotamia.

As the crow flies, Mari is located less than 500 km from the Mediterranean Sea, about 1000 km from Egypt, from the Arabo-Persian Gulf and from the Caspian Sea, some 1400 km from the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and more than 3000 km from the valley of the Indus.

Lying at the end of the first third of the Euphrates south of the Anatolian mountains, Mari occupies a central place in the Near East, but not central in relation to Mesopotamia. The site is located midway between the Mediterranean and Babylonia, but only a third of the distance towards the Sumerian lowlands and the river mouths at the Arabo-Persian Gulf.

These facts, which explain certain aspects of Mari's history, should not mask the importance of other geographic features which are just as fundamental.

### *The physical environment (figs. 3 and 4)*

As it crosses Syria, the valley of the Euphrates forms



*Figure 1: Topographical plan of Tell Hariri at the time of its discovery.*



*Figure 2: View of the tell.*

only a narrow ribbon between the zones dominated by the steppe. Along its course, cliffs border the bed in which the river carved its way during the Quaternary depending on variations in sea level. The borders of this region are thus rather difficult to define, except by the river, which imposes a vision of this space as an artery or corridor, a territory lying between two poles and serving to unite other regions.

Therefore, as a crossroads, it is not so much the borders of the region that are significant as the links which it provides.

At the heart of the river system are the valley and its cliffs; to either side and to the north and south, steppes stretch to the horizon, undulating and stony, with wadis that are usually dry, a land of pasture and nomadism.

Some 400 or 500 km away, a more or less continuous





*Figure 3: Vertical aerial photograph of the site.*



*Figure 4: Aerial photograph showing the site in the foreground and the valley with the Euphrates in its desert environment in the background.*



Figure 5: Position of Mari in the Syro-Mesopotamian world.

arc of highlands and mountains to the west, north and east forms a belt which naturally and historically defines the Syro-Mesopotamian river system, whose north-west to south-east flow leads to the alluvial plain of Babylonia and continues to the Sumerian delta, defined on the east by the Zagros mountains and on the west by the northern edges of the Arabian deserts.

In general the elements are simple: a great mountainous arc to the north and east, which continues as plateaus and various mountain chains towards the Himalayas, a great river course lying north-west/south-east, and to the south, plateaus of steppe and desert which form the extremity of the great arid diagonal (fig. 5).

Two north-south river valleys link the Euphrates and the foothills: the Balikh and the Khabur.

The first begins more than 220 km as the crow flies from Mari, and represents the first link, after the south-eastward turn of the Euphrates, with the northern mountains; this role of connection ensures its importance and the development of the sites which lie along it. At the confluence with the

Euphrates, the city of Tuttul, known from the Mari texts, commanded access to the Euphrates valley.

The valley of the Khabur forms the second north-south link between the Euphrates and the foothills. It is wider and much longer than the Balikh, and its river far more impressive. Its geological history does not appear to correspond exactly to that of the Euphrates, but this had little influence on the basic relations between this valley and Mari throughout the latter's existence.

The Khabur plain, between the Euphrates valley and the Taurus, is formed by a network of water courses whose sources spring from the foothills of the mountains and which join to create the river. As there is an annual rainfall of more than 250 mm, agriculture is possible without irrigation; because of this the plain is rich, and has been well-populated since the Neolithic with numerous towns. Moreover, because of its position at the ends of the Taurus valleys and the beginning of the Khabur valley on the route from the foothills, the plain is a true crossroads where trade activities were particularly important; it was





Figure 6: Map of the Near East and of the region of Mari.

to play a large role in the economic and political history of northern Mesopotamia in all periods and especially in that of Mari (fig. 6).

Beyond the river system are the maritime outlets and the seas that provide clear and historically significant boundaries; these are the Mediterranean to the west, the Indian Ocean to the south, south-west and south-east, and the Black Sea and the Caspian to the north. The Arabo-Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, which separate the Arabian peninsula from Iranian territory and from the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, form a kind of inland sea leading to the Indian Ocean.

The whole of the basin is thus oriented towards the Indian Ocean, and the importance of this geographical relationship may be grasped by considering the greatness of the Indus civilisation in the third millennium and the ties that could be woven with Mesopotamia. And in the north, where the system begins, lies the mountainous region with immediate proximity to the major Mediterranean centres of the second and first millennia.

### The river

It is the Euphrates and its main tributaries that ensure the articulation of this geographical whole.

The river is some 2,400 km long, the longer of the two rivers of the Mesopotamian basin. As it emerges from Anatolia, it would appear that it must flow into the Mediterranean, but a very slight undulation in Syria causes it to turn its course towards the south-east, thus causing its waters to run into the Indian Ocean. In crossing Syria it cuts a wide valley on the plateau, which it exits upon entering the alluvial plain; during this course the Euphrates receives its main tributaries, both descending from the edge of the Taurus and joining the main river on its left bank, first the Balikh and then the Khabur, the latter formed by a dense network of rivers fed from the foothills. Once in the alluvial plain, the river advances slowly towards its mouth, where it sinks into marshes and often changed its course over time. The force of the river causes us to forget that from the point where it turns south-east not long after it

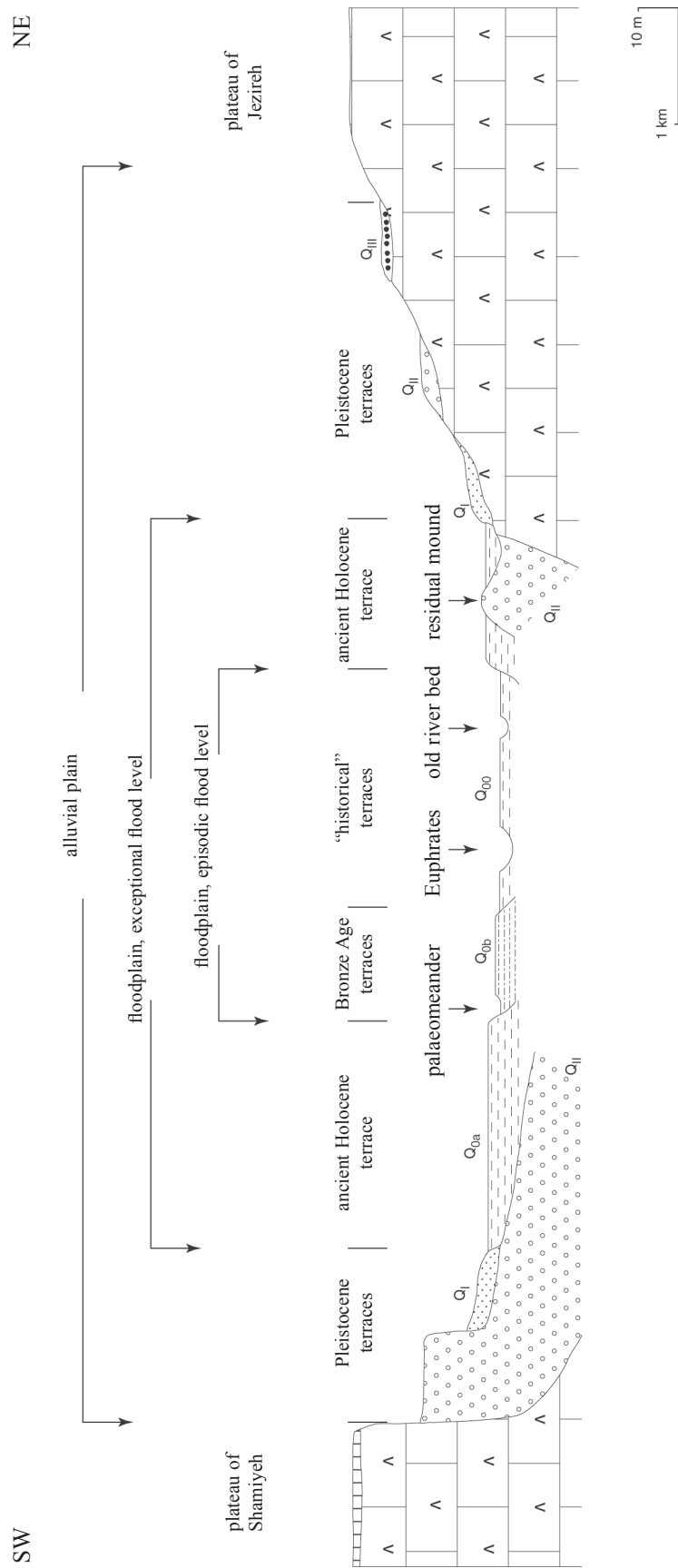


Figure 7: Section across the Euphrates valley at Mari.



Figure 8: The narrows of the Euphrates river at Halabiyé.

enters Syria, it flows through a zone where only between 100 and 200 mm of rain falls per year, that is, a sub-desert region. This is why, in spite of the contributions of the Balikh and the Khabur, it decreases from about 950 m<sup>3</sup>/s at its entrance into Syria to about 700 m<sup>3</sup>/s at its mouth, a severe loss caused by infiltration as well as evaporation.

In this geographical system, it is the middle section of the river, from Jerablus to Abu Kemal (more than 600 km), that directly concerns Mari, as well as the beginning of the Iraqi segment, but of course the first and third segments are just as important, despite the distances.

The valley is a steep-sided groove 30 to 40 m deep in relation to the plateau (fig. 7). It resembles a winding and irregular ribbon 6 to 14 km wide on average, but it sometimes shrinks to only a narrow gorge for geological reasons, such as its passage through basalt in the region of Halabiyé-Zalabiyé (fig. 8).

Within the valley, the topography is apparently flat, but in fact it is complex in detail, with many micro-reliefs that are natural or caused by human activity.

The Euphrates is a powerful river and may produce destructive floods in the spring, but its lowest level in autumn is sometimes so low that navigation is impossible. However, it provides a year-long water supply, important in a region of such low rainfall.

The spring floods can be catastrophic; the wheat having already sprouted, the crops can be completely destroyed. The great floods of the Euphrates have always caused great anxiety, and the care taken in ancient times to ensure a protective system based on dykes is understandable. Some figures provide an idea of these exceptionally high water levels: the average flow of the river at its entry into Syria is 950 m<sup>3</sup>/s; in April it is usually 3422 m<sup>3</sup>/s, but was 7000 m<sup>3</sup>/s in 1954 and even 8500 m<sup>3</sup>/s in 1967, which resulted in disastrous flooding. In 1954 the daily maximum was 9410 m<sup>3</sup>/s, 10 times the average and 40 times that of low water, which is not more than 220 m<sup>3</sup>/s.

The Balikh and the Khabur, less affected by snow melt from the Anatolian mountains, function differently, with high water fed by winter rains, which can sometimes aggravate the effect of snow melt.

### ***The profile of the valley***

A series of cycles since the Pleistocene, consisting of phases of deposition and phases of incision, have modelled the profile of the valley. Strips of ancient terraces, lying near edges or against cliffs, are evidence of the great age of this type of evolution. These terraces are stony, gypseous and too high for irrigation; they usually have a cover of steppe vegetation.

The Holocene terrace, the most important for the exploitation of the valley, rises at least 2 m above the lower river valley where the deposits of the historical period are located. Consisting of fine materials, it was formed between 8000 and 4000 BC. Probably affected by the establishment of a temporarily more humid climate, the river became more vigorous and began to cut into the Holocene deposit. It appears that in the middle and late Bronze Age there occurred a new phase of deposition less ample than that of the Holocene, which was to be followed by other lesser oscillations which produced the terraces of the historical period in the river basin (fig. 9).

On the way towards the cliffs from the river, there are thus three zones of varying importance; first, in the main river bed, there are terraces of the historical period that are the lowest; these are areas for food crops, as the proximity of water excludes the need for any large installations. Then, generally 2 or 3 m above the level of the river is the edge of the Holocene terrace, which extends sometimes for several kilometres and is the zone *par excellence* for the cultivation of cereals by irrigation. Beyond are strips of ancient terraces with crusty surfaces, too high to be irrigated, where only herding can be practised.

The problem of salinisation of the soils, still crucial today, results from the naturally high content of salts dissolved in the water table. The water is undrinkable, manifested in the absence of wells, and is useless for irrigation. When salt concentration on the surface becomes excessive, it prohibits cultivation and destroys architecture.

Mari was established in a valley drained by a powerful river, but was this enough for humans to consider true colonisation? Did the climatic conditions favour this?



Figure 9: Edge of the Holocene terrace on which Mari was built.

### ***Climatic conditions***

Climatic conditions are difficult throughout the Near East. The temperatures are on average high, even very high, and between night and day 20 to 25 degrees in temperature difference are common in the desert and sub-desert zones, while between the winter and the summer the temperature varies from 0° C to more than 50° C. The instability of the winds is one characteristic – the over-heated southern deserts produce the hot and desiccating *khamisin*, while from the snow-capped mountains of Anatolia the icy *shamal* descends in winter. These winds sometimes blow violently for days without bringing any humidity, and are responsible for particularly aggravating sandstorms. A very unequal distribution in time and space produces a pattern of precipitation that is very often insufficient; although the isohyet of 600 mm of annual precipitation generally associated with the arc of mountains bordering the Mesopotamian basin appears sufficient, the total volume rapidly diminishes with distance from the first foothills. In the plain of the Khabur, over just 40 kilometres, there is a difference of 450 mm rainfall at the foot of the mountain and 250 mm at Hassaké. This precipitation is moreover more concentrated in the winter period, from October to March, and falls in the form of violent thunderstorms or showers, followed by long periods without a drop of rain.

The line or isohyet of 250 mm is of extreme importance for human activities, as it marks the limit between dry farming and irrigated farming. Above this amount of precipitation it is possible to depend on rainfall, while below this amount it is necessary to put an irrigation network into place. It is easy to understand that occupation

of particular areas has been dominated by this constraint since agriculture began. Mari lies in a zone in which the annual average precipitation is 140 mm.

This aridity is the logical consequence of a situation in which the deserts are largely dominant. How does Mari figure in this situation?

As a whole, the region of Mari, a sub-desert or even a desert zone, has a harsh climate characterised by torrid summers, a midwinter that can be very cold and rainfall that is rare but often torrential and dangerous. The temperatures, first of all, are characterised by high amplitude; in summer a dry heat dominates and the average maximum temperature for July is above 40° C, while daily temperatures of 45° C or 48° C are very frequent between the months of May and October. But as these temperatures are in part generated by strong sunshine from a clear sky, at night they can descend to 20° or 15°, a difference that enables toleration of the great heat, except when the *khamisin* blows regularly. The winter minimum average in January is about 1°, and 22 days of frost have been observed at Abu Kemal; but during the day, for the same reasons, the thermometer rises to 25° or more, except when the cold is heightened by the north wind which has passed over the snow-capped ranges of the Anatolian mountains. The sandstorms from the southern deserts are oppressive but bearable when they arrive in the form of calm air full of dust resembling mist, but they can also be very violent. The rainfall demonstrates the situation in all its gravity. Abu Kemal receives only 140 mm while Deir ez-Zor has 160 mm; within a hundred kilometres the amount of rainfall drops by 20 mm! This is far from the 250 mm necessary to practice farming without irrigation;



with such a deficiency in rainfall, how is the foundation of the city of Mari to be explained? And other factors aggravate this situation even more: variations of 50% in rainfall from one year to another, rain in the form of short and violent storms causing water flow that is destructive to the soils and not favourable to infiltration, rain falling for less than 40 days with a peak in November and another in February/March.

The region of Mari is thus strongly influenced by aridity; the dry season lasts 8 to 9 months, from April to October, and the consequences for the natural vegetation, which is extremely fragile, are serious. All regular agriculture is impossible; this is certainly true of the plateaus, but without intervention on a large scale, the situation is the same in the valley.

### ***The economic resources of the valley***

An inventory of the economic resources of the region of Mari may be quickly established. There exists no raw material of mineral origin that would have been of interest in ancient times on the plateau, which consists of a gypseous rock of poor quality, mediocre even for architecture. These plateaus are moreover useless for agriculture because of the gypseous soils and the absence of water. Seasonal herding of sheep is possible, but with low productivity.

In the valley and mainly on the Holocene terrace, but only with an irrigation network, the presence of fertile silt allows agriculture on a limited surface area. This area is further reduced by the effect of salts from the encrusted zones, such as the ancient terraces, where only herding may be practised, as it is on the steppic plateau.

There is in fact no particular resource that predisposes this region to play an important role, and none of its basic components are particularly favourable to agriculture. However, thanks to the presence of the river, irrigated farming can in certain parts of the valley provide the agricultural staples necessary for human occupation. But how could these have become the source of true wealth and the economic base of a powerful kingdom?

### ***Plain and mountain: trade movements***

There is another factor that should figure in an evaluation of the economic function of the kingdom of Mari.

The different regions of the Near East are marked by a fundamental complementarity (fig. 6). The river basin, where it is not exclusively desert, provided the agricultural products from cereals and herding that were the bases of life for the communities that resulted from the Neolithic revolution. The introduction of irrigation practices greatly favoured the growth of economic activities. But the agricultural wealth was accompanied by a total lack of certain necessary materials. A land without stone and almost without wood, Mesopotamia had to do without, find replacements for these materials, or simply

import what was lacking. However, the mountain regions surrounding the river basin, although not possessing the agricultural possibilities of the basin, are nevertheless rich in stone, wood and minerals. In general, mountain ranges and high plateaus were to play an essential role in the economic history of the Near East. Their resources differ markedly from those of the basin, and very quickly this complementarity led to a system of trade, which was to become a driving force behind the rise of the Near East, and the transformation of its settlements from villages to organised urban centres.

Mari is a major example of a city in a valley established on one of the main routes of this trade system at the dawn of the historical period.

### ***Conclusion***

Thus, in this particularly hostile environment, at the beginning of the third millennium, in spite of all the climatic and economic constraints, a decision was made to build a city for several thousand inhabitants. On the face of it, it is not clear why such a choice was made; there was no crossroad, no particular production, no potential agricultural development. What led these people to establish themselves in such a desert, to devote their energy to such a creation, a creation that would appear to be irrational?

### ***History of the archaeological operation***

#### ***The discovery of Mari***

Situated in the valley of the Euphrates 120 km south of Deir ez-Zor, Tell Hariri was rarely noticed by travellers on the way to Mesopotamia, because the track followed the foot of the southern cliff, passing well away from the site (fig. 2). After the end of the First World War, the League of Nations granted a mandate for Syria to France. In August 1933, a large fragmentary statue was brought to light by Bedouins looking for stones to cover a burial. Lieutenant Cabane, commander of the French army post at Abu Kemal near the frontier with Iraq, a dozen km south-south-west of the site, was informed of the discovery, went to the tell and decided to have the object transported to Abu Kemal and then to Aleppo. He understood that it was an important work, and news of the discovery of a Sumerian antiquity was sent to the Museum of the Louvre by H. Seyrig, director of Antiquities of the High Commission at Beirut. The latter accorded the concession for the site at the demand of R. Dussaud, keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the Louvre, who entrusted André Parrot with the excavation of a trench in order to rapidly identify the site.

Until then there had been hardly any propositions of identification for Tell Hariri, as very few archaeologists had left the main road to visit it. Only W. F. Albright had thought that these ruins could contain the remains of the city of Mari.



As the city is mentioned in the royal Sumerian king lists as the seat of the tenth dynasty after the Flood, we know that the fortunes of war did not favour it against Eannatum of Lagash (ca. 2500 BC), against Sargon and Naram-Sin in the period of the Akkadian empire (between 2340 and 2223 BC) and against Hammurabi of Babylon who destroyed its walls in 1760 BC. The city is again mentioned in the Middle Assyrian period, and then, probably based on older itineraries, as Merrhan in the itinerary of Isodorus of Charax at the beginning of the first century AD. Furthermore, three statuettes carry an inscription mentioning Mari (Iku-Shamash at the British Museum and two Puzur-Ishtar statuettes at Istanbul) as well as a relief found at Babylon, that of Shamash-reshusur, an Assyrian governor of Mari in the thirteenth century BC.

André Parrot arrived at the site on December 10, 1933 and began excavations on December 14 at the place where the “Cabane statue” was found, in the central part of the tell, but the meagreness of these first results led the excavator to move his teams on January 14 to the western edge of the site. The following day, discoveries began with statuettes, including those of Ebih-II (fig. 156), Idi-Nârum (fig. 159) and in particular, on January 23, that of Lamgi-Mari, king of Mari (now read as Ishgi-Mari) (fig. 155), which definitively identified Tell Hariri as Mari.

### ***Stages of exploration of the site***

Since December 1933, Mari has remained a constant in French archaeological research in the Near East, in spite of the vicissitudes of international politics. The 41 campaigns that have taken place between December 1933 and November 2004, that is, over a period of 70 years, may be divided into four distinct phases based upon the discoveries and the research.

Phase 1: The first six campaigns, carried out before the Second World War (1933–1938), include the discovery of the temple of Ishtar with its inscribed statuettes, then the clearing of the great royal palace of the beginning of the second millennium with its works of art, its paintings and some fifteen thousand whole and fragmentary tablets, and finally the unearthing of the temple of Lions and the study of the High Terrace.

Phase 2: After 12 years of interruption due to the war, excavations resumed from 1951 to 1954 around the High Terrace and the edges of the Massif Rouge, with the study of the temples of Ninhursag, Shamash, Ishtar and Ninni-zaza, and produced exceptional evidence for the foundation and many statuettes.

Phase 3: After 5 years of interruption (Suez crisis), a new long sequence of research, from 1960 to 1974 (eleven campaigns), was devoted first to the study of the northern esplanade of the High Terrace and its lower levels, and then beginning in 1964 to the exploration of the palace of the middle of the third millennium.

Phase 4: Another 5-year interruption preceded the creation in 1979 of a new team directed by Jean-

Claude Margueron. Twenty new campaigns took place between 1979 and 2004 with a program that emphasised understanding the city, its evolution and its integration into the natural environment. The beginnings of the city of Mari were thus defined. Since 2005 the excavations have been directed by Pascal Butterlin.

### ***Development of the investigation***

These stages show clearly that the progression of the discoveries was accompanied by a development in the scientific investigation.

First, the discovery of the palace of the Amorite period illuminated, with a bounty of information, the period of the First Dynasty of Babylon, which was still poorly known. Then, while the laborious work of translating the written evidence began, under the direction of Georges Dossin, attention fell upon the religious questions relating as much to the beginning of the second millennium as to the middle of the third, an endeavour that culminated in the exploration of the palace of the middle of the third millennium with its Sacred Precinct. Then, concerning the question of the origins of urban civilisation, it was the beginnings of the city that held special attention, providing information that was particularly new and original. Finally, the development of the city over three clearly distinct periods, thanks to the discovery of three successive cities (Mari I, Mari II and Mari III) has enabled clarification of the historical data.

### ***Operations in the main excavation areas (fig. 10)***

#### ***Area A: Little Eastern Palace***

Excavation began in 1979 and continued to 1995, excluding 1993 and 1994. The objective was to provide in particular a stratigraphic sequence for the site, which A. Parrot had not been able to establish:

- A trench produced evidence for City I.
- Clearing of the whole building of City III with its apartments and its hypogea; tablets.
- On the surface, poor constructions of the Khana Period.

#### ***Area B: northern trench***

Excavation began in 1979 and continued until 1991 with a break between 1985 and 1990. The goal was to establish whether the northern edge corresponded to the natural edge of the site or whether it was the result of erosion:

- Definition of the strata of City I and the first urban construction.
- Study of the House of Artisanal Installations of City II; some forty tablets of the middle of the third millennium.
- Tombs and foundation layers of City III.

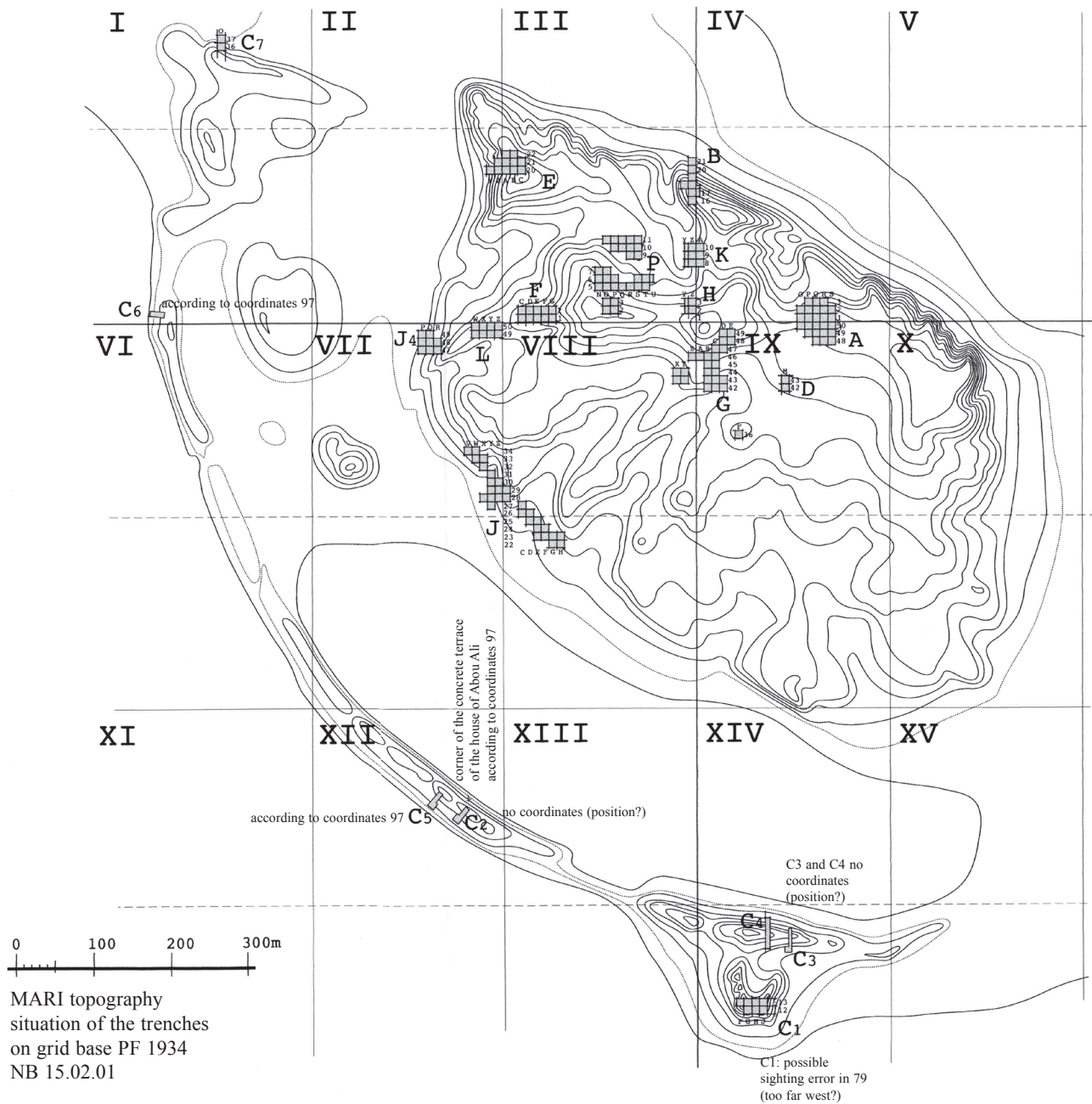


Figure 10: Principal areas explored: excavations of A. Parrot in white zones, excavations of J.-C. Margueron in zones with squares.

### Area C: exterior rampart

Begun in 1979, continued until 1982, then resumed in 1997 and 2000:

- Study of the exterior belt for Cities I, II and III, first embankment, then rampart.

### Area D: a trench

Begun in 1982 and stopped in 1984 as it did not fulfil the objective, which was to find a homogenous and undisturbed stratigraphic sequence.

### Area E

Begun in 1984 to investigate the nature of the constructions on the north-west promontory and continued until 1990, it produced the remains of a large building of City III and a Middle Assyrian level.

### Area F

Started in 1987 to engage research on urbanism, work in this area continued regularly until 2000 and was then suspended. It produced information on City I, but especially

houses and tombs as well as two architectural models of City II, and the foundations of a large residence, a potter's house and tombs, some very rich, of City III.

### ***Area G: sector of the temples***

This is the highest point of the site, where excavation has been carried out since the beginning of excavation. Particularly intense from 1936 to 1938 and from 1951 to 1954, research was resumed in 1987 and has continued every year since.

Different trenches in the heart of the Massif Rouge, in the temple of Shamash, under the temples of Ninni-zaza, Ninhursag, and the Anonymous Temples have revealed constructions of City I, but no identified temple.

Belonging to City II are the High Terrace of the Massif Rouge with its temple-tower and all the temples of the sector of excavation zone G (temples of Ninni-zaza, Ninhursag, Ishtar, Shamash and the so-called Anonymous Temples ("inferior temples"), as well as an architectural model produced from the street that leads to the sector of the temples.

The High Terrace and the temple of Lions, the *Sahuru*, the temple of Shamash with the foundation bricks of Iahdun-Lim and its redans as well as the foundations of a large residence belong to City III.

### ***Area H: sector of the House of the High Priest***

Excavations began in 1961, continued until 1964 in the house of the High Priest, and resumed in 1995–1999 in a deep trench (called H) down to the first level of the city.

### ***Area J: interior rampart***

This area was chosen to define the interior rampart because after every heavy rainfall the traces of a large wall, 6 to 8 m thick, were clearly visible at the south-west base of the tell. The excavations began in 1997 and continued to 1999, revealing the ramparts of Cities I, II and III as well as a gate of the city, which was in use during the three urban phases, that is, from the foundation in the thirtieth century BC up to the final destruction by Hammurabi in the eighteenth century BC.

### ***Area K***

Opened as a trench in 1998 and investigated until 2000, this area revealed a highly flattened level of houses of the Amorite dynasty period (end of City III) with a large collection of tablets, followed by a level of the Seleuco-Parthian period, characterised by several modest artisanal constructions.

### ***Area L: the artisans' quarter of City I***

This area was opened in 1935, then abandoned, resumed in 1999 and systematically investigated up to 2005. Excavation revealed, besides the foundation levels of Mari, the stratigraphy of an artisans' quarter of City I with houses, workshops of bronze-workers and a cartwright, and tombs, as well as a souk of City II which appears to have continued in City III. This excavation area provided the most information on the origins and activities of the city.

### ***Sector P: sector of the palaces***

In the centre of the tell, these excavations were undertaken during the second campaign in 1935 with tremendous discoveries; they were still incomplete in 2004.

For City I no palace reappeared, but the sometimes large trenches in the sector of the palace gate, in Space 4 and in the Palace central space of the Sacred Enclosure have produced since 1994 the first evidence for the importance of metallurgical activity as well as levels of occupation containing material.

Belonging to City II is a remarkable Royal Palace, still in the process of being uncovered, with 4 phases (Palace P-3, Palace P-2, Palace P-1 and Palace P-0) which have only produced a few tablets, but also a very important find known as the "Treasure of Ur" and many fragments of mosaics.

In City III a "phantom palace" was found, so called because only a few elements remain, as well as the Great Royal Palace with its thousands of tablets, its objects of daily life and its paintings.

In the Middle Assyrian period a cemetery developed in the ruins of the palace.

### ***The sector of the temple of Ishtar***

Excavations began in 1934 and continued to 1936-37. Trenches were dug in 1997 and 2000 (recorded under excavation area J).

Levels of City I were recognised, in the fine building with stone foundations of the first level of the city, followed by simpler levels of habitation; the period ends with the construction of three large tombs in stone which contained more funerary material.

In City II a temple of Ishtar was constructed which contained a fine collection of statuettes.

Almost nothing remains of City III in this sector.

### ***The quarter of the Red House***

A trench opened in 1953 and continued in 1954 revealed, a hundred metres east of the temples quarter (since called excavation area G), a particularly well-preserved house of City II called the Red House, which contained the

remains of an architectural model. In the same sector a group of bronzes inscribed with the names of the daughters of Naram-Sin was found. Different trenches produced further information in 2002 and 2004, in particular on the organisation of the compartmentalised infrastructure built for City II.

### ***The trenches of André Parrot***

Two exploratory trenches dug by André Parrot, of which nothing is known and which have disappeared from the surface of the tell, were not recorded on the topographical map. The first (Dec. 1933–Jan. 1934) started at the sector of the temple of Ishtar and joined the northern edge of the tell; stone tombs were found in the north of the site. The second, excavated in 1962, started from the quarter north of the High Terrace of City III and ended very near the first. André Parrot excavated other trenches at various points on the site, but these were barely recorded as he considered them unimportant.

### ***The chronological framework***

The chronological system retained at the present time is that of average chronology, which situates the reign of Hammurabi between 1792 and 1750 BC. It does not yet appear possible to adopt the multidisciplinary study of H. Gasche, J. A. Armstrong, S. W. Cole and V. G. Gurzadian (*Dating the Fall of Babylon*, 1998) which lowers by 96 years the dates of this king, even though the arguments seem convincing; the time necessary for systematic testing being past, it is likely that it will become seriously accepted. But it does not resolve all the problems; a destruction of Mari in 1664, which is quite possible, instead of the traditional date of 1760, leads to lowering in the same way the dates of the *Shakkanakku* period and consequently those of the Akkadian empire that existed in the twenty-second century. This assigns an apparently excessive duration to the city of the Archaic Dynasties period, which began about 2900, if the C14 and thermoluminescence dates are accepted. It is true that gaps exist in the chronology of City I, whose duration we cannot yet precisely estimate. Thus it must be admitted that the problem of chronology is not yet satisfactorily resolved.

The choice was thus made to accept a periodisation of the history of the city based on the stratigraphic and urbanistic information, rather than on the uncertainties of

present-day chronologies. Three main urban periods were thus defined: Cities I, II and III.

### **Conclusion: the history of Mari provided by archaeology**

As may be observed, the work carried out over more than 40 campaigns has been concentrated in the western half of the tell. A large part of the site remains, in which major discoveries are possible. A large urban area could provide new data, where particular establishments such as the School of the city (EDUBBA or *bīt tuppī*) could produce tablets and perhaps a library, not just archives. An important project has recently been carried out: the archaeological team has cut a west-east stratigraphic section that runs through the whole of the site, from the rampart associated with the temple of Ishtar to the Little Eastern Palace, that is, almost 700 m long with only one real gap between the Massif Rouge and the Little Eastern Palace. Another section, which is shorter and runs north-south (northern edge of the tell in excavation area B up to the Massif Rouge), provides comparison of data from more than half the site, enabling study of the urban development.

City I, founded around 2900 on a site with no previous human settlement, was accompanied by a regional infrastructure consisting of an irrigation network, a navigable canal and a derivative canal linking the city to the river. The last preserved level appears to belong to the beginning of the twenty-eighth century BC, but as the tell was levelled during the re-founding, the exact date and the conditions of its disappearance are not known. It is not even known whether City I no longer existed when the levelling work for the foundation of City II was undertaken.

City II was the product of a complete reconstruction, probably carried out during the twenty-sixth century BC, and of a reactivation of the entire hydraulic and urban structure. After a relatively short period of existence, a century and a half or two centuries, it was completely destroyed, probably by Naram-Sîn, king of Akkad.

City III, built on the levelled ruins of this destruction, existed from the twenty-third century to 1760, first under the dynasty of the *Shakkanakku* who reconstructed the city and then under the domination of the Amorite kings, whose last representative, Zimri-Lim, was defeated by Hammurabi of Babylon. The city never recovered from this destruction, although remains of the Middle Assyrian and Seleuco-Parthian periods indicate a sporadic occupation of the tell.



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## II. The foundation of Mari and regional development

### The foundation of Mari on the Holocene terrace

To understand Mari's situation, its relation to the river must be examined. The geomorphological study of the terrain shows unambiguously that the river could never have directly served the city, which was established about 2 km from the edge of the Holocene terrace, clearly seen in the topography north and east of the site, where it forms the limit of the main bed of the river (figs 9, 11, 12).

There are two essential questions concerning the life and the survival of the city. First of all, how were the inhabitants supplied with water for daily use, as the salty water table could not be used and the walk of 4 to 6 km a day to provide water for each home would have been unthinkable? Then, if boats came to Mari, as demonstrated in textual evidence of the eighteenth century BC, where would they have stopped – along the river, but outside the city? The often highly valuable cargoes would have risked dangers in an unprotected environment, and separation from the centre of power and the centre of the economy in such conditions would have been incomprehensible. Mari must be considered a daughter of the river, and it is inconceivable that the port would have been independent of the city, in contradiction to the normal practice of Mesopotamian cities.

The problem is thus to find how to resolve these contradictions. If all the elements are taken into account (Mari's position on the Holocene terrace, the impossibility for a city of the Mesopotamian basin to be far from the river, the difficulty of supplying water for daily use), the only solution lies in the existence of a linking canal between the Euphrates and the city.

However, no written evidence from the period of the Amorite dynasty appears to mention the existence of a canal serving Mari, so is this solution a likely one even though the texts are silent? Unless there is a problem of

vocabulary, a linking canal may have been considered at that time to be a part of the river, or in any case different from a canal created for irrigation.

The second difficulty lies in the fact that during the initial research, no clear trace of a canal joining Mari to the river was observed; but this was simply because it had not been looked for. Once the question was asked, indications of its existence began to be discovered. Old black and white aerial photographs taken vertically to establish a map of Syria and an oblique photograph taken by the army of the Levant before the Second World War, published by André Parrot (*Mission Archéologique de Mari* II-1, pl. V-1), clearly show the trace of a channel that links the vestiges of the city to the river (fig. 4). Confirmation of this trace was provided by the team responsible for the geomorphological survey.

Thus it is evident that at a certain period a canal existed that linked the city to the river. But did it function only at the time that the written evidence attests that boats passed by Mari (without mentioning the canal itself), that is, in the eighteenth century BC? If this is believed, then it cannot be understood how Mari was able to exist for more than a millennium (from its creation to the period of the Amorite dynasty), as without this link to the river to ensure its integration in the economic system, the city could not have functioned on a daily basis.

The topographical organisation of the architectural remains and their position in the valley show that Mari was established as a new city, created *ex nihilo*, according to a circular plan 1.9 km in diameter, on virgin land of the Holocene terrace more than 2 km from the Euphrates, linked to the river by a canal. Its present-day morphology is the result of erosion that has occurred since the destruction of the city (fig. 12).

That the city was established on virgin land is clear for two main reasons. First, no village could have existed



in that spot before the city's foundation, because of the distance from the river and the fact that the ground water was not suitable for consumption. Second, no village could have existed before the city's foundation because of the circular plan that was laid out. The perfection of the design of a circle implies that the humans who traced it did this on a flat surface. To lay out a perfect circle with a radius of about 950 m from a fixed point, either using a rope or a plane-table, requires a horizontal plane.

There was thus no village existing before the foundation of the city. In fact, in all the trenches excavated, the altitude of the first level of occupation – always an urban level – does not vary more than fifty cm.

It is thus certain that the circular form of the city is that of its foundation. Could this morphology be symbolic or religious? There is another reason to explain this shape. The Euphrates is characterised by spring floods caused by snow melt from the mountains of eastern Anatolia. Before the recent large constructions were built to control the waters, on average flooding was contained in the main bed of the river. But if the snows are exceptionally abundant and rain adds to the process, then the river swells, breaks out of the main bed and invades the Holocene terrace. The effects of flooding are terrible, not only for the crops destroyed but for all earth-built human constructions, including houses and canals; if a volume of moving water invades an area of land, it easily attacks all constructed angles, demonstrated by the enclosure wall of Tell Atij (valley of the Khabur), attacked at its base by a rise in the waters of the nearby wadi. But a curved shape causes water to flow past rather than attack. The choice of the builders of Mari appears to reflect a desire for defence against flood water, and the exterior belt would have been a protective barrier against floods that were rare but violent, and may have occurred several times in a century in certain periods of the third millennium. And of course this protective base against flood water could be used to build a wall for defence against men. The excavations carried out in this sector of the city in 1997 revealed this double function.

But probably the most important reason for the choice of a circular shape was to facilitate the elimination of rainwater towards the periphery. A street network radiating from the centre of the city was the solution for this function of evacuation.

It thus appears that the circular plan, the distance from the river and the linking of the site to the river by a canal are features that are closely related. They are aspects of a preconceived plan that implies a good understanding of the phenomena that it was necessary to dominate.

The shape of the tell at the beginning of excavation resulted from the long process of erosion of the site and its surroundings since the destruction of the city by Hammurabi. The missing part can be defined by continuing the path of the circle of the exterior edge that remains. The validity of this operation is ensured by the fact that the canal crossed the city in the missing part (fig. 12).

But why did this giant project at the beginning of the

urban era – the building *ex nihilo* of a city with a diameter of nearly 2 km, linked to the river system by a canal – appear to be necessary to the inhabitants of the valley at the beginning of the third millennium? And why was such an exceptional enterprise carried out in a sub-desert region?

## The canals

The geomorphological analysis of the valley, carried out by Bernard Geyer and his team up to Halabiyé and in the valley of the Khabur, with particular attention paid to the vestiges of the canals, because there is textual evidence for their existence, provides a clear vision of the hydraulic design. This has enabled understanding of the foundation, the construction and the life of Mari. Three hydraulic works of importance were discovered.

### *The linking canal (figs. 11, 12)*

Discovered by means of the topographical analysis of the site and by a study of aerial photographs, the linking canal is proof of the expertise of the inhabitants of the valley in hydraulic design, without which the city of Mari could not have existed.

Its existence is proven, but it is difficult to locate exactly the points of junction with the river. The aerial photographs clearly show ancient meanders upriver and downriver. If these meanders were active during the period of the city's construction, they could have served to connect the canal. But if they no longer functioned, the builders could have used them to facilitate the junction with the river, and the canal would have been much longer, between 4 and 7 km at least.

An important characteristic of this canal was its great depth (fig. 13). Because there was not sufficient means to raise the level of the water to ensure the connection with the river, it was necessary to dig down to the level of the river, to establish the canal at an altitude of about 170 m (the present altitude, probably close to that in ancient times). Thus the bottom would have been at least 168 m, and the canal an actual arm of the river. As the water level of the canal was the same as that of the river, the port was located at the altitude of the base of the main bed; it was therefore necessary to dig into the Holocene terrace to ensure that the canal was positioned at least 2 m below the level of the base of the city.

The function of the canal was first of all to provide water for the city, and secondly, to enable access for the boats that sailed up and down the Euphrates. A port, still undiscovered, was the key to the system, a *karum* where the boats stopped and were loaded with merchandise or unloaded before leaving for another destination, by boat or by land.

The destruction of the city in 1760 BC led to its abandonment and the silting up of this canal. Did the canal still exist in the Middle Assyrian period? Evidence is lacking to confirm this. Perhaps it was put back into service



*Figure 11: Line of the canal linking Mari to the river.*

momentarily, but for provision of water to the Assyrian colony rather than for river transport, whose importance at this period is unknown.

Then, as it was mostly filled in and not usable, the canal became during the high floods that occurred rarely but also during the annual floods, a channel for the flood waters every spring. This contributed to the erosion of all the northern part of the tell and this process was all the easier as the canal crossed the city, being at the same level as the river. Thus the process of erosion erased all the installations between the left bank of the canal and the dyke-rampart to the north and east, of which nothing remains.

Only a third of the original city is left, perhaps the most important part. Ironically, the feature that enabled Mari to exist and to flourish was also to be the cause of its disappearance, which is fortunately only partial.

### ***The irrigation canal (fig. 14)***

On the right bank of the river a large irrigation canal was discovered in sections over a distance of 17 km, a few kilometres north of the site. There are enough vestiges to show that it was a very large work, in a heightened position on the Holocene terrace so that water in the canal could reach the fields by gravity.

The canal was more than 100 m wide, which would seem excessive for a simple irrigation canal a few dozen

kilometres long. Its size and volume indicate that the builders intended that it resist heavy floods; its massiveness would prevent its being washed away, and once the danger passed repairs could be made without any need for total reconstruction.

Thus it was the necessity for protection from heavy flooding that led to the size and volume of this installation, exactly as for the circular enclosure wall of the city.

It was probably built about the time of the foundation of the city, but its date has not yet been determined.

The simplest solution for supplying the canal with water would have been by diversion. Given the discovered section of its path, its source at the Euphrates would appear to have been at the foot of the cliff of Dura-Europos; however, as the canal would have had to have crossed the outlet of the Wadi es-Souab where particularly destructive floods occurred, this solution is impossible. But its water could have been derived from a meander, gone today but for which traces may exist, on the south side of the confluence of the Wadi es-Souab, so that it would have been safe from these floods and even have been able to take advantage of them as they generally occurred at the time when irrigation was needed.

There is also another possibility, a retaining dam established some 17 km upriver in the Wadi es-Souab. Such a construction has been discovered, although later in date and in stone. There is not enough information to confirm such a dam, but the knowledge of hydraulics necessary

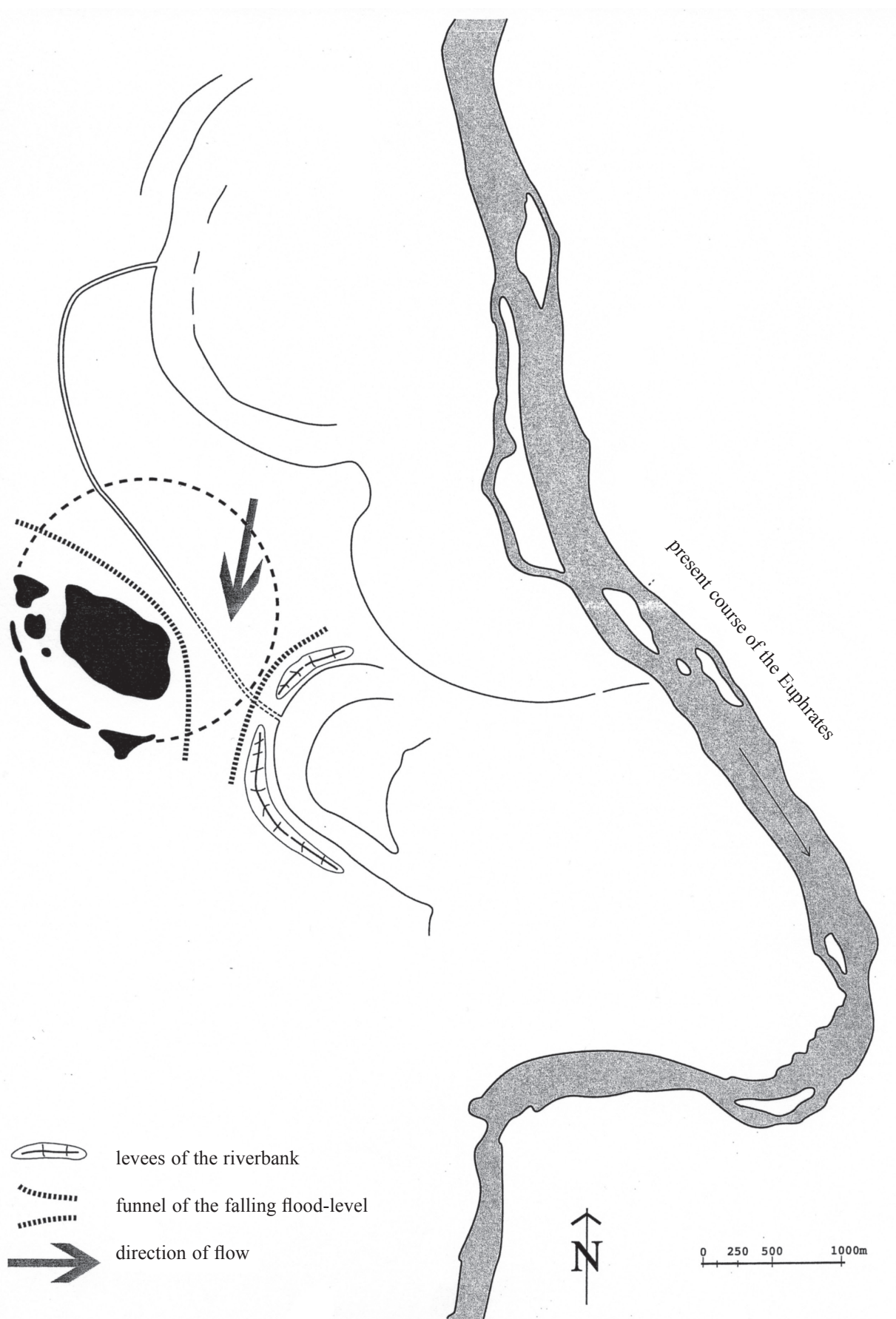


Figure 12: Position of Mari in relation to the river, the linking canal and the areas eroded since the end of Mari.



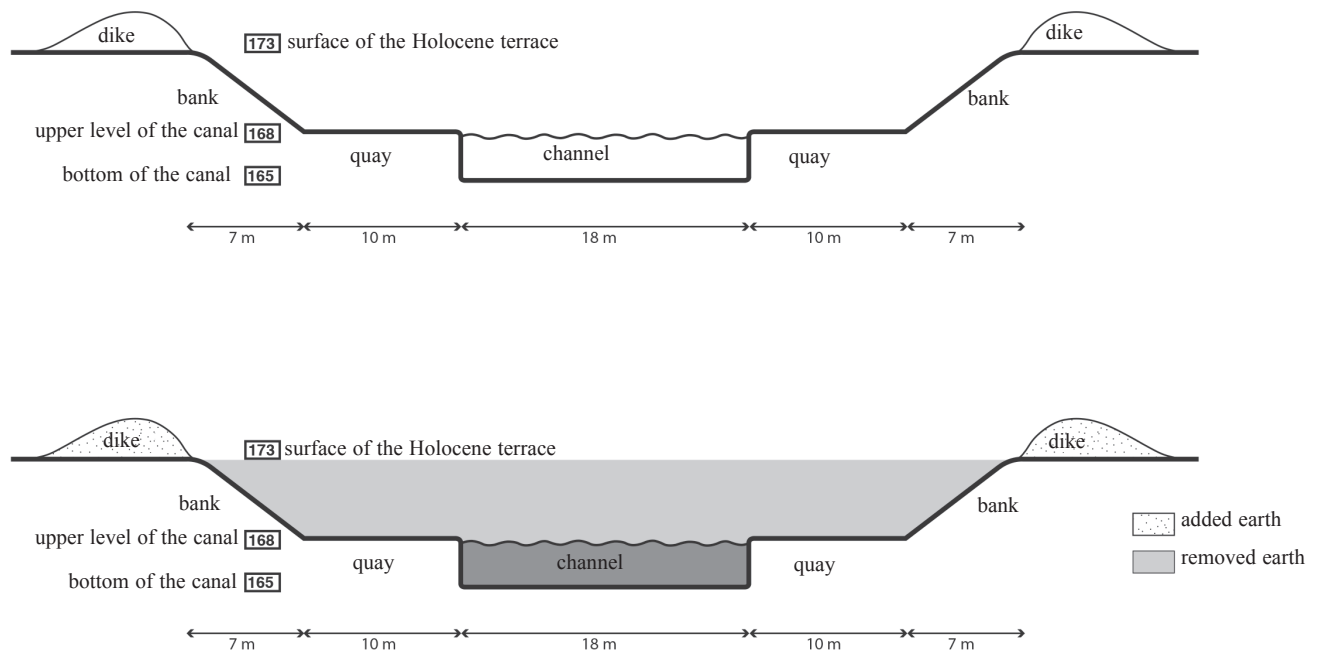


Figure 13: Reconstructed profile of the canal and its relation to the level of the river.

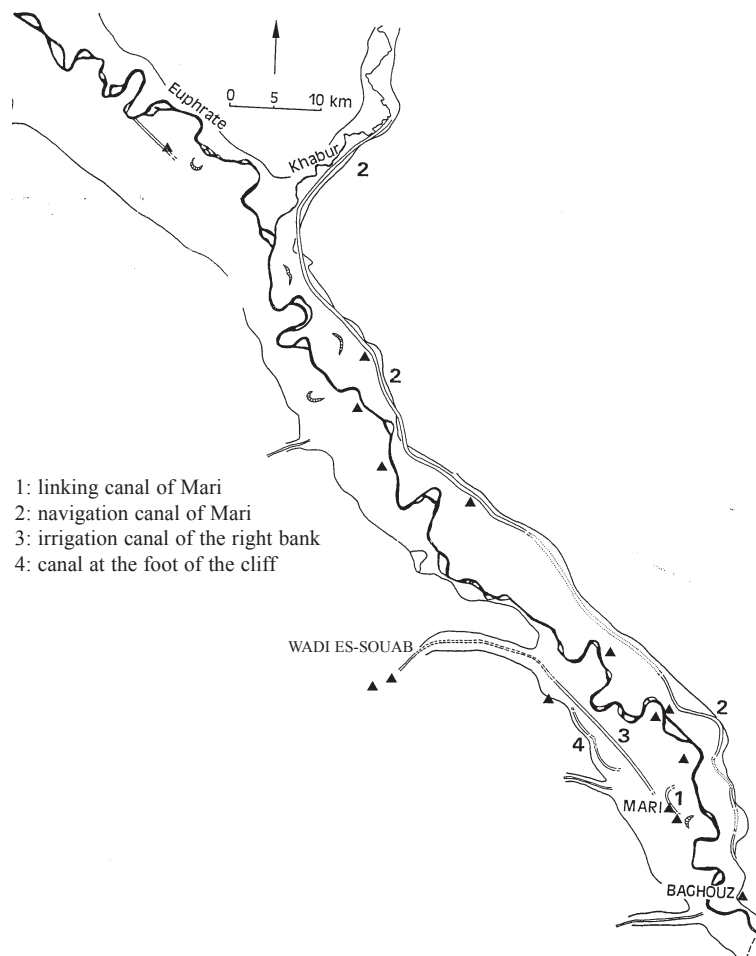


Figure 14: Location of the principal canals in the region of Mari.

for constructing canals is of the same nature and degree as that needed to create earth dams. Canals and dams go together in technological thought and in the perception of geography (topography and morphology). Thus it is entirely possible that this solution was chosen by the builders of Mari at the beginning of the 3rd millennium.

This canal provides clear evidence that the Holocene terrace on the right bank of the river, much more developed than that of the left bank, was devoted to agricultural activities.

### ***The navigation canal (fig. 14)***

The existence of a third large canal, on the left bank this time, is an essential piece of information that completes the infrastructure of the valley. Already reported by J.-R. Kupper for a part of its course under the name of Nahr Dawrin, this canal took on unexpected importance at the end of the survey (fig. 16).

It had in fact been discovered starting at the Khabur, where it branched off in all likelihood at es-Sijr. We followed it, with interruptions as it is not always well preserved, along the edge of the valley, between two embankments or sunken in the plateau, along a clearly continuous line, up to the environs of Abu Kemal where it would have joined the Euphrates after a course of 115 or 120 km.

This is an exceptional construction, impressive first of all for its surprising length. And the consistency of its gauge is also surprising; it varies between 8 and 11 m, never less. The slope of its course is very regular, 0.2 for 1000, which allowed the water to flow easily but without excessive current, although in some places a wadi may have modified this ratio by deposits of detritus.

In order to not be affected by floods, this canal was dug on the ancient terraces and the glacis at the foot of the cliff, thus high enough in relation to the valley and above the Holocene terrace, except at the end of its course where it is supported by the terrace before joining the Euphrates.

When a meander approached too closely from the cliff of the left bank and risked engulfing the canal, the decision was taken to take the canal across the plateau by digging a trench almost 15 m deep (figs. 15, 16).

In the sections where it was thus incised in the plateau, large works were carried out to avoid, during heavy rain, the arrival of large volumes of runoff water; basins to hold sediments, traces of zigzags and dykes to break the descending wave show the degree of technology possessed by the engineers responsible for building them.

All the characteristics of this canal – length, consistency of gauge, position on the glacis, cutting into the plateau – converge towards a single unexpected conclusion: this could not be an irrigation canal, but must be a canal for navigation! First of all, the Holocene terrace of the left bank of the valley appears little developed in this place, very little in relation to such an important work; there are deviations in the course, but rather than deliberate

diversification to provide irrigation for fields, they are only later modifications carried out because of local difficulties presented by the terrain.

This does not mean that at certain periods of its history certain sections of its course were not used as irrigation canals, but its first function was for navigation, for which it was conceived in its totality to follow the Euphrates between the Khabur and Abu Kemal.

Other canals that could have been in use in the Bronze Age – in the region of Deir ez-Zor, downstream from Zalabiyé, near Ashara/Terqa – were discovered by the survey team. But the first three analysed here are enough to demonstrate the scope of the works carried out to exploit the region at the time of Mari's foundation.

### ***Dating and significance***

In the absence of firm textual data – the use of writing was not yet common – there is no direct means of dating the canals. However, to estimate the significance of the role of Mari it is necessary to know whether they were contemporary to the foundation of the city or not.

Certain data are significant. The essential point is that Mari cannot be separated from its linking canal; the choice of the founders to establish the new city on the Holocene terrace automatically implied the digging of a canal connected to the river. The birth of the city clearly proceeded from a population that had not only mastered hydraulic techniques but did not hesitate to use them in grandiose projects that were not essential. The choice of the canal was the result of a desire to better protect the city against floods, but it could have been cut, following tradition, into the edge of the terrace. It is clear that if the founders made this choice, it was that digging a canal several kilometres long in the terrace did not seem to them too overwhelming a project in the construction of the new city.

Thus, at the period of the foundation of Mari, the men capable of constructing a city 2 km in diameter with an imposing canal linked to the river were also in a position to create on the terrace an irrigation canal dozens of kilometres long, even two canals, that is, one for each of the two defined territorial units or “alveolar” areas situated along the valley between the narrows at each end. As the necessary technical ability is the same, could they not have built a navigation canal, even one 120 km long?

Some epigraphists and archaeologists question an early date for this canal (beginning of the third millennium) and would place it at the time of Iahdun-Lim (eighteenth century BC) who boasts of having constructed canals (but who probably only reactivated them – the vocabulary does not enable any differentiation), or in the Assyrian period when the system could have been reactivated, there being no evidence to prove its creation at that time.

Before a transfer of the dating to even later periods (for which there is no proof either), a few questions must be asked. First, why was Mari built as a new city with





*Figure 15: The Nahr Dawrin cut into the plateau (photo Guichard).*



*Figure 16: The Nahr Dawrin.*

a linking canal? What justified such an enterprise in a desert environment? Second, why was this city built in this particular spot, involving heavy constraints that would have complicated its creation? Indeed, if the irrigation canal and the navigation canal are excluded from the foundation of Mari, then the creation of the city cannot be understood. There would be nothing to explain the establishment *ex nihilo* of this city 2 km in diameter in the middle of a

desert and 120 km from a confluence which could have played the role of a crossroads. However, if the following factors are considered, then the reasons for the regional development of Mari become clear:

- the clear economic importance of the Euphrates since the Uruk period,
- the rise of urbanisation in central and southern

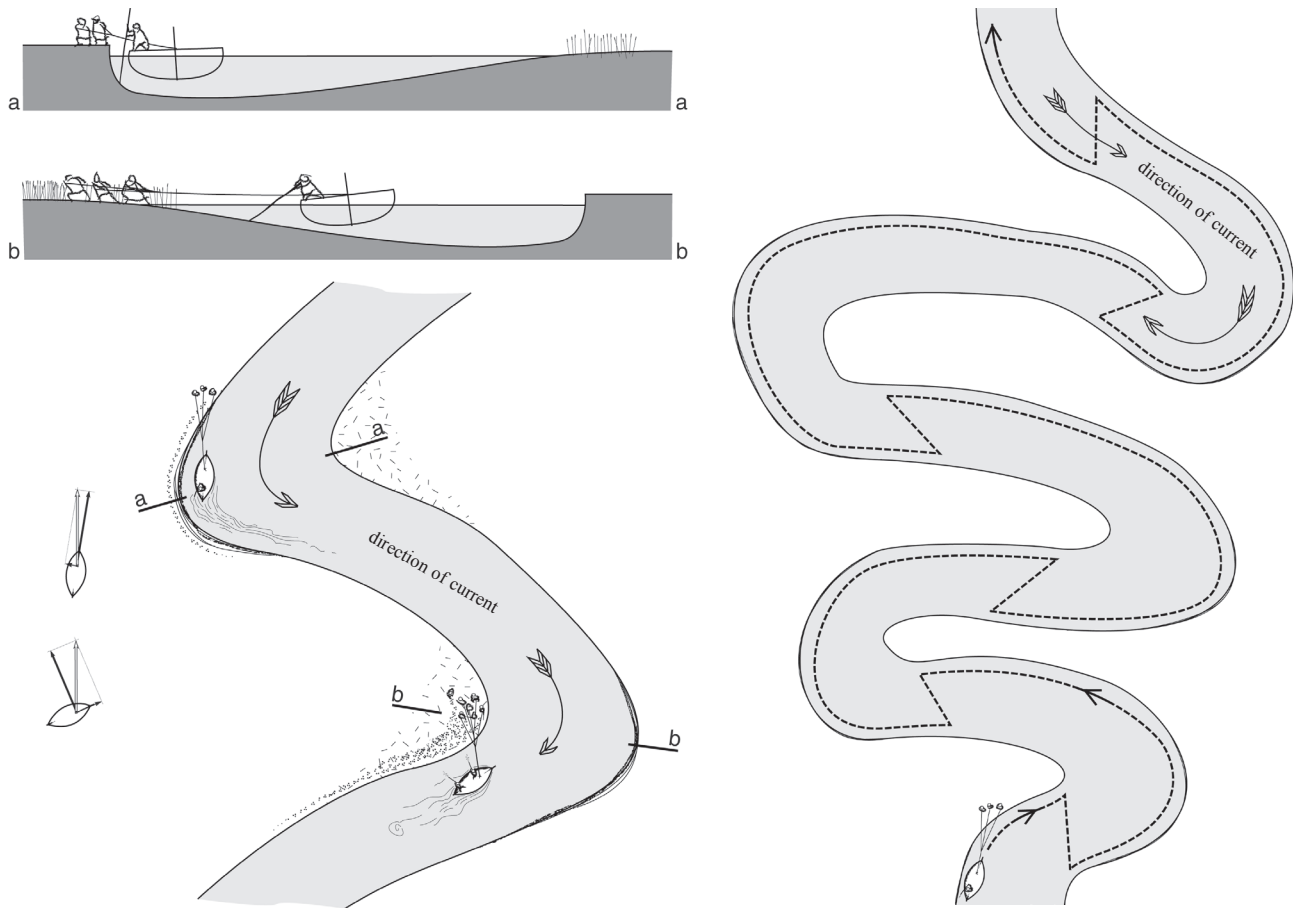


Figure 17: The work of haulers going upstream on meanders. Along a concave bank (a) they have only the effort of traction. On a convex bank, they must distance themselves from the bank to avoid sinking into it, the effort being practically doubled and practically impossible. The solution is to change sides every half-meander (b), but this results in many manoeuvres and a slowing down of the operation.

- Mesopotamia from the end of the Uruk period,
- the rapid growth of the need of the new cities for ores coming from the mountains and for wood from Lebanon, the Amanus and the Taurus, transported on the Euphrates,
- the near-absence of means of transport other than by boat for heavy materials,
- in particular, the fact that all trade necessitates, if it is not to rapidly disappear, return trips and reciprocal exchange.

Indeed, it is this traffic that confers importance on the development of the region in a given economic context. However, to evaluate all this, we must return to the navigation canal and its several functions:

- to shorten, simplify and make the journeys secure by avoiding the meanders of the lower Khabur and the Euphrates; the distance gained is considerable – 120 km instead of 160 to 170 km – but it is perhaps not enough to justify the enterprise;
- to bring together in one navigable channel, during periods of low water level, the waters that tended to

become dispersed in many small streams unusable by boats; thus even in periods of low water, the traffic would not be interrupted, and the operation is already much more advantageous as it enables trade to continue on a regular basis.

- to reduce the obstacles and the difficulties along the watercourse; the meanders would have represented significant problems and additional fatigue for the haulers (going upriver) as well as long delays in the transport (fig. 17).

This hindrance, going upriver, would have been enough to justify a canal to avoid the meanders. Moreover, the canal in itself is evidence for the quantitative importance of upriver transport, and indicates the intensity of trade at this time.

Thus, we have on the one hand, at the beginning of the third millennium, a new city with a circular enclosing wall and a linking canal, without any apparent economic basis, situated in a desert environment which hardly favoured urbanisation. And we have on the other hand a navigation canal, which on the left bank of the river links the lower valley of the Khabur with the Euphrates at the natural

narrowing of the river's passage at Abu Kemal, a canal that we cannot date with certainty, but whose existence is a sign of flourishing trade.

If these two factors are brought together by dating the construction of the canal to the foundation of the city, then a new equation appears, implying a political power engaged in large-scale regional development to create the basis of a state founded on international trade. In order to feed a population dense enough to carry out these great projects, ensure their maintenance and create the peacefulness necessary for the transit of boats, the political power developed the Holocene terrace on the right bank of the river with its irrigation canal to provide water for cereal crops.

Thus a coherent image emerges from the observations made during the excavations and the surveys.

Finally, it is not enough to simply affirm that the canal network existed at the time of Mari. As the archaeological evidence will show, the truth is that the foundation of Mari was dependent upon the creation of this network, which was deliberately established to fit into an economic organisation based on trade and the control of circulation between two complimentary economic poles, the alluvial plain of Mesopotamia and the northern mountainous regions.

## **Organisation of the kingdom of Mari**

What image of this kingdom may be drawn at the moment of its appearance in history? Was it a totally new creation?

### ***The antecedents***

It is quite likely that, before the foundation of Mari, there already existed a political power that occupied the area between the confluence of the Khabur and the narrows at Baghouz, because it is reasonable that the rise of trade between Mesopotamia and Syria was progressive; stages probably occurred in the development of regional organisation, and it is likely that links with the plain of the Khabur already existed. Why look in western Syria for the wood needed in Mesopotamia if conditions enabled it to be obtained at the Khabur? Obviously this did not exclude relations with western Syria, for which the Urukian foundations of Habuba Kabira, of Sheikh Hassan and Jebel Aruda provide evidence for the end of the fourth millennium.

The occupants of this portion of the valley probably quickly realised that the special geographic configuration of the land could be used to advantage to ensure for them a dominant position in the trade between Mesopotamia and northern and western Syria.

Thus the city of Terqa, located on the edge of the river at a place which allowed it to control land passage as well as the river, could have been established to watch, near the overhang of the plateau of Shamiyé, the portion of the river that it overlooked directly. It would have been a kind of advance post on the confluence.

### ***The territorial base***

The territorial base was established where there were a number of geographical advantages. The first was the confluence of the Khabur and the Euphrates, which linked the great river with a northern plain firmly attached by its hydrographic network to the fertile foothills of the Taurus; the second was the presence of two wide "alveolar" areas along the valley where extended agriculture by irrigation was possible; and the third was the presence of two barrier points, the narrows at Halabiyé/Zalabiyé to the north (fig. 8), and at Baghouz/Abu Kemal to the south, the latter situated just before the incision of the Euphrates into the Iraqi plateau, preventing any enlargement of the valley until it entered Babylonia. All these factors facilitated the establishment of a territorial base for agricultural production that would have been sufficient to found a state that could oversee the meeting of the two movements of trade at the location of the present-day Deir ez-Zor, and exercise tight control over traffic in both directions.

Of course, this control was intended to exercise a right of passage, which the texts of the eighteenth c. BC demonstrate perfectly. In return for this toll, safe passage was guaranteed by the sovereign during the crossing of the kingdom's lands.

The operation was already profitable enough that the power that occupied the confluence and the two "alveolar" areas understood the value of constructing a canal between the Khabur and the southern narrows to facilitate traffic in both directions, which probably became heavier and heavier.

This operation was associated with the foundation of Mari in the conditions that have been presented. The goal was to bring the political centre closer to the end of the navigation canal and the spot where the king's agents exercised their control.

The installation on the right bank was in all likelihood to keep watch over the terrestrial route that became important at the end of the fourth millennium with the development of donkey caravans that followed a track on the right bank to avoid crossing rivers such as the Khabur or the Balikh (fig. 14).

### ***Transport***

The kingdom of Mari was created to exploit a trade route originally based on the river. The river system always played a role, even after the construction of the navigation canal and even after the growth of land transport which followed the invention of the wheel. Mari at the time of its foundation was part of the first urban generation, which was based on transport by water; but it was also part of the second generation that was built partly thanks to transport by land, with the re-foundation of City II.

Transport by river depended on wooden boats (sometimes simple rafts for downriver transport) carrying from 6 to 90 tons. Downriver, they navigated following the current and had priority for reasons of security, but also because it



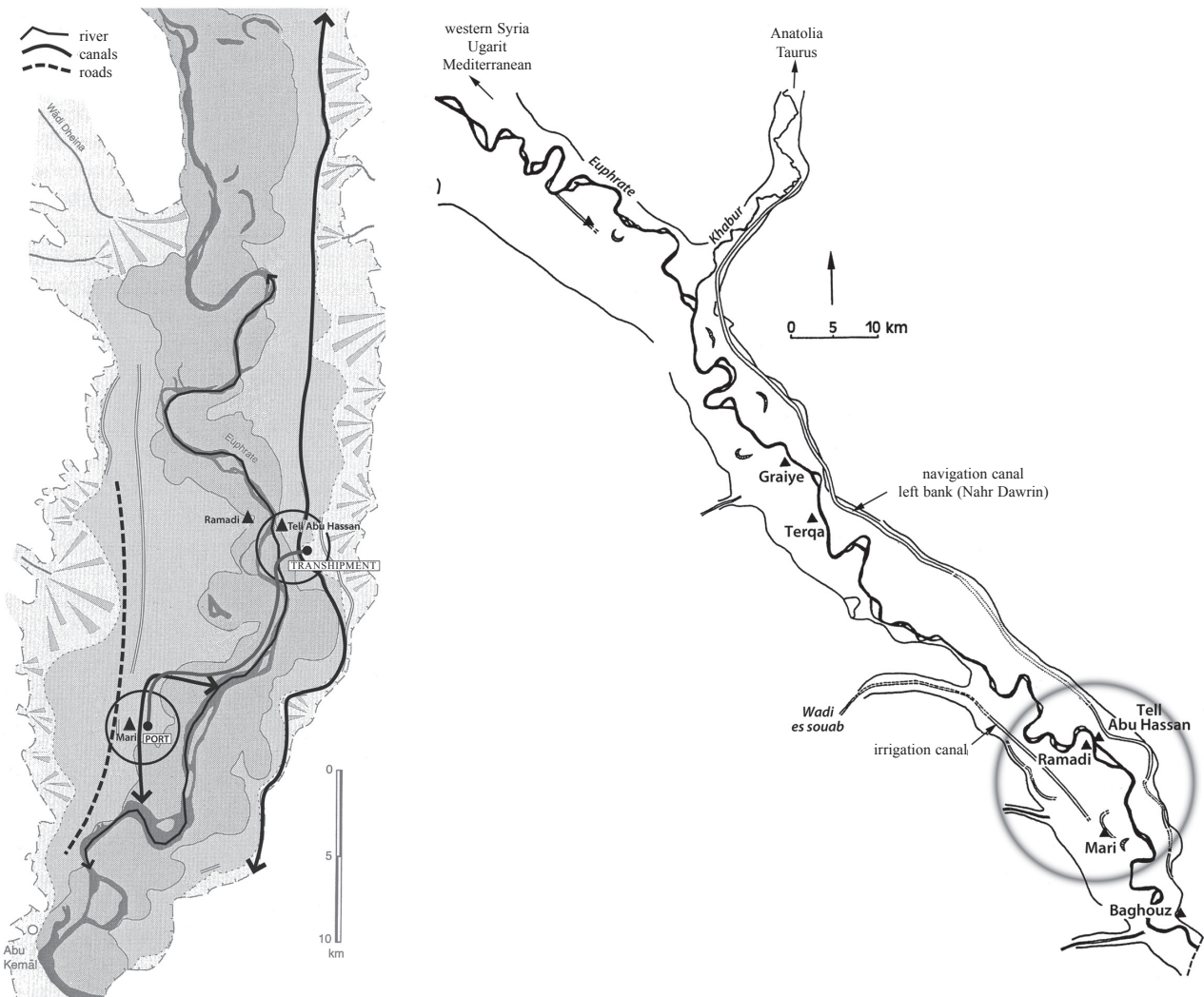


Figure 18: The adaptation of the navigation canal, along the left bank of the Euphrates, that provided a shunt system at Suprum (present-day Tell Abu Hassan) to enable the boats coming from the Khabur by the canal to join Mari and for those coming from Babylonia to link Mari to the plain of the Khabur by the canal and not by the river, which was encumbered by many meanders.

was difficult to manoeuvre, especially when loaded. Upriver transport was carried out by towing, and the texts of the period of the third dynasty of Ur indicate that one individual could pull one ton per day for some ten kilometres.

Thus the use of the canal on the left bank coming from the Khabur would certainly have lightened the traffic on the river. Going downriver, the boats coming from western Syria would have always followed the river course, while those from the Khabur used the canal if they did not have to stop at Mari. Otherwise they could follow the lower Khabur and the Euphrates and stop at the capital. But it may have been simpler to descend on the canal as far as Baghouz, and then go upriver to Mari which was only a dozen kilometres distant.

The problem is apparently less clear for the ascent, as the boats coming from Mesopotamia certainly used the canal which had been conceived for them and thus could not pass close to Mari. The parallel situation of the two routes would thus seem to engender a surprising difficulty.

In fact it appears that the developers of the region had given thought to this difficulty, because at Suprum, present-day Tell Abu Hassan, the navigation canal curves to approach the river (fig. 18). A letter of Samsî-Addu clearly shows that at this spot, not far from Mari, there was an actual shunt system which enabled the boats, probably thanks to transshipment, to rejoin the canal without forcing the boatmen to make long detours. Thus Suprum would have played the role of a turntable or nerve centre and ensured the junction between the river and the canal, which suggests a very accomplished organisation of the system.

The large irrigation canals of the right bank could also have been used in the river transport, but only over short distances and with a purely local purpose, as they were not linked to the general network and could not be.

Several caravan routes could have existed. The first, coming from western Syria, flanked the river on its right bank with side routes leading to the oases of the Shamiyé. There would also have been routes on the left bank, which



followed the watercourse and could have reached the plain of the Khabur as well as the neighbouring regions. Land transport was carried out with donkeys, which carried, depending on their race, from 60 to 120 kg. As they needed about 30 to 40 litres of water per day when carrying their loads in the desert environment, the caravans had to follow itineraries where water was available, preferably along rivers or canals. Oxen were used to pull wagons, whether covered or not.

### ***Occupation of the land in the “alveolar” areas***

The occupation of the land in the two “alveolar” areas is particularly interesting, as it reveals exploitation by humans of a particular environment and how they adapted it to their needs from the beginning of the Archaic Dynasties.

From the moment that a power took interest in regional planning, with the construction of a navigation canal and the foundation of a large capital, it would have anticipated the production of cereals in sufficient quantities for a population that was sure to grow. Thus the power in place took on the construction of a large irrigation canal on the right bank, an imposing work as we have seen, which was perhaps accompanied by the construction of a dam in the Wadi es-Souab. The choice was thus to cultivate the Holocene terrace, which probably formed a favoured royal domain; there is an absence of sites along the canal, which probably signifies that it functioned episodically, only in the spring, and that only a single crop was cultivated, wheat. Once the wheat was placed in storage, the area would become pasture, exactly like the ancient terraces at the foot of the cliff or the plateau itself.

In the “alveolar” area at the confluence of the Euphrates with the Khabur, the Holocene terrace of the right bank was also cultivated, probably on orders from the palace if we are to believe the reports of Kibri-Dagan, governor of Terqa under Zimri-Lim, who was constantly dealing with the state of the canals in his sector. The Nahr Saïd probably formed the principal artery of the irrigation network of the

right bank of this “alveolar” area; what is certain is that the maximum of space was devoted to agricultural production and that the servants of the king applied all their efforts towards the success of the crops.

The Holocene terraces of the left bank, much less developed than those of the right bank (fig. 7), carry no traces of irrigation, as though the creation of the navigation canal was more important, the problem of taking water and of the course of the canal obviously presenting a very different situation because of the length of the canal. But it is highly possible that small systems of irrigation enabled occasional exploitation of part of the left bank.

In the major bed of the Euphrates, legumes were probably cultivated thanks to the use of counterpoise-lifts, called *shadoofs*.

The effort made to irrigate crops in this portion of the valley was remarkable. However, we do not know whether it was enough. At the time of the Mari texts, twice at least in a very short period, we see that the kingdom lacked wheat and that the king had to have it brought from the Khabur plain (a caravan of a thousand donkeys, probably about ten tons) or from Emar in western Syria (some 360 tons by boat) (Michel 1996). Thus it could have been that production was at the mercy of droughts or other events and that needs were often difficult to meet; recourse to more productive regions that were less susceptible than the sub-desert area would thus have been necessary.

### ***The ring of gardens at Mari***

At Mari itself, it is probable that there were, in the space between the principal tell and the exterior belt, gardens and orchards in which grew the aromatic plants of which the Mesopotamians were very fond. We may at least infer this from texts of the last phase, in particular one that narrates the escape of two slaves who were captured by gardeners after the first enclosure wall. It is also probable that all along the linking canal were gardens and orchards that were watered by *shadoofs*.

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### III. The historical stages

One of the major discoveries of the last thirty years was that the history of Mari was not a smooth and continuous development, but was characterised by abrupt breaks and levelling followed by re-foundations, and by military defeats followed by reconstruction. Twice the city was able to rebuild itself, which clearly shows that Mari's reasons for existence were always present. The third break marks the end of the city.

#### **The foundation of Mari and City I (Early Dynastic I–II, 2950 – ca. 2650 [?])**

Carbon 14 and thermo-luminescence analyses both indicate that Mari was founded between 3000 and 2900 BC, that is, at the beginning of what is called Early Dynastic I.

For City I, deeply buried and thus difficult to access, excavation and geographic analysis have revealed the system of defence, consisting of the circular embankment that protected it against floods and the interior rampart, 6 m thick, that ensured protection against enemies. Also discovered were one of the city gates, linked to a large street running from the centre of the high city, two quarters mainly devoted to artisanal activities – metal-working, dyeing, pottery – and a few dwellings (figs. 19, 20).

No temples or palaces have been discovered, which probably explains why there are few art objects from this period.

Nothing is known of the historical outline, as no text has been found. But the archaeology shows clearly that the city existed for some time, although it is not possible to determine when it ended. The top of the archaeological layers that make up City I were levelled to an altitude of about 175.50 m, somewhat more at the top of the tell, somewhat less at the periphery, the variations rarely exceeding 1 m. This was an voluntary act that that

concerned the entire city *intra muros*; no evidence appears to have survived to provide the complete sequence of City I beginning with the end of Early Dynastic II, and it is impossible to pinpoint the cause and time of its disappearance or abandonment. There is no evidence to deny the hypothesis that the city existed in the form of City I up to its re-foundation, but none to prove it either (fig. 21).

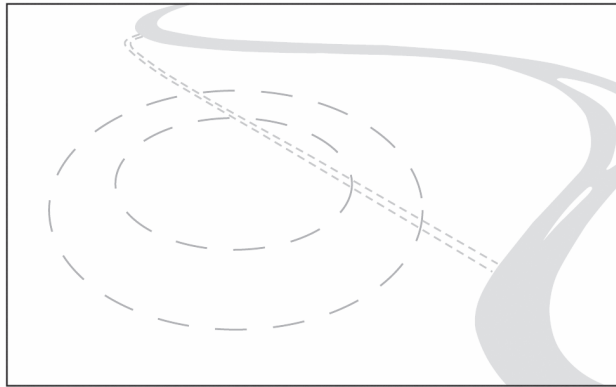
#### **The re-foundation of Mari and City II (Early Dynastic III and the Akkadian period 2550–2220)**

As will be discussed further on, at about 2550 BC, during the Early Dynastic III, a new city was built on the levelled ruins of City I (fig. 22), at a consistent height, using highly elaborated techniques and new principles whose precise origin has not been clearly discovered on any other known site in Mesopotamia or Syria, but whose use was general everywhere (fig. 22).

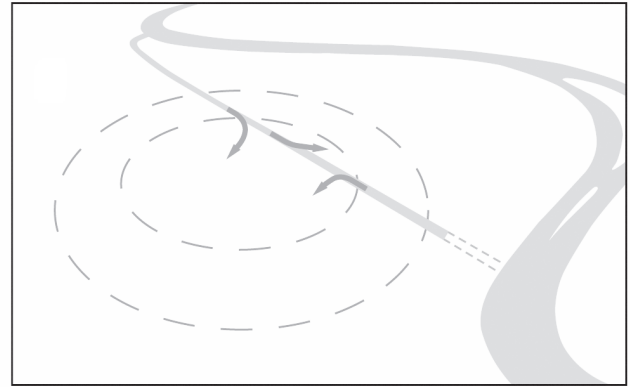
This is evidence for a true urbanism, concerning not only the establishment of a defensive system, but the structuring of the city, with its political, religious and economic hubs and its residential quarters, and with the organisation of a street network laid out before any construction and designed to ensure rapid evacuation of rainwater, either by flow or by absorption.

This City II (fig. 23) existed for three centuries, straddling the Early Dynastic III and Akkadian periods. Its relations were as close with the Syria of Ebla and Emar as with the Babylonia of Kish and the Sumer of Ur.

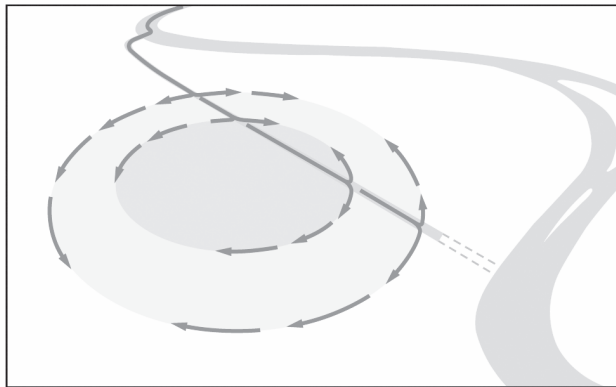
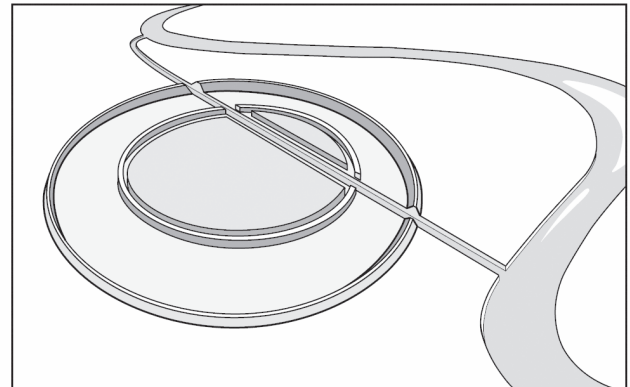
Then history appears at Mari with the unearthing of texts, somewhat later than at other cities, which may be, as so often, the result of the chances of archaeological discovery. A few dozen tablets found in several deposits and inscriptions on stone statues have enabled identification



digging of the canal – line on the ground



beginning of the digging of the canal

digging of the canal and  
accumulation of the earth at the centre

final state: infrastructure of City I

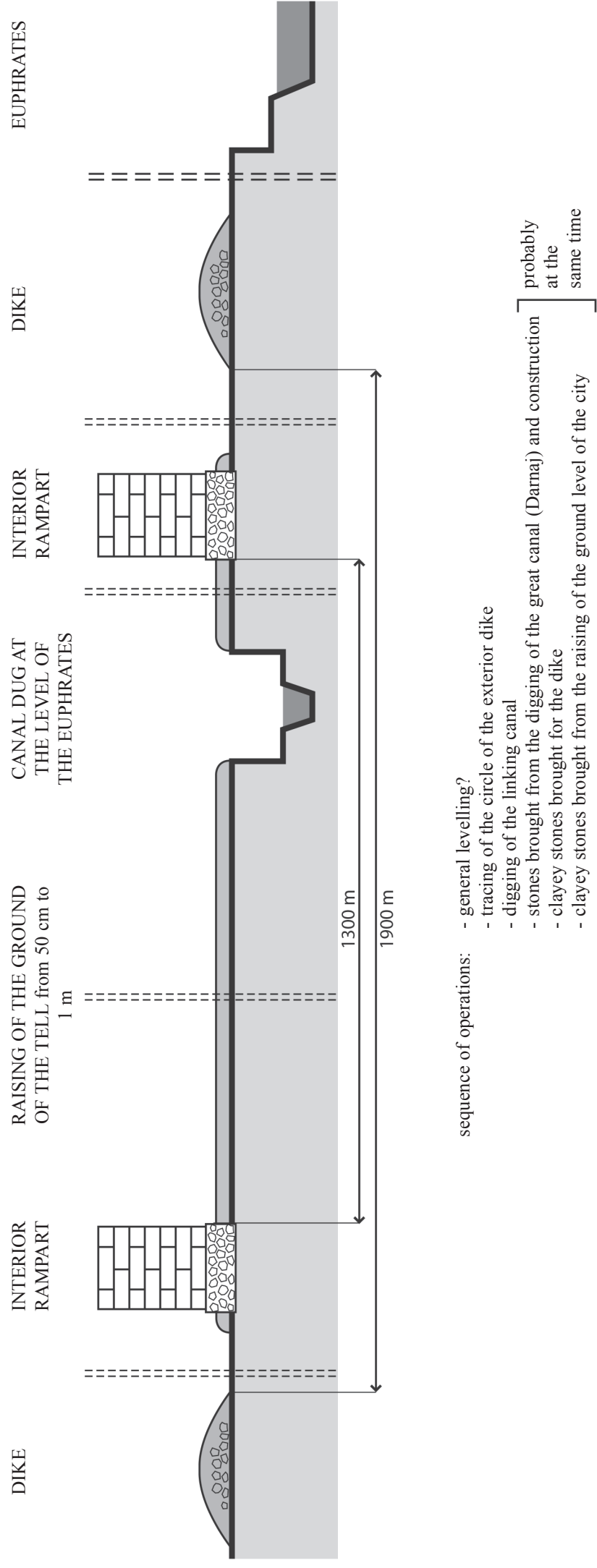
*Figure 19: The topographical adaptations of City I at Mari. Top left: line of the linking canal, the dike/embankment and the edge of the city; top right: digging of the canal and tipping of the earth into the interior of the urban edge to raise the first level of the city; bottom left: alluvia from the river and the start of the canal with stones to ensure the base of the dike/embankment, the enclosure and certain urban constructions; bottom right: after the digging of the canal and the raising of the urban infrastructure, construction of the dike/embankment and the base of the enclosure; the city was then ready for habitation.*

of the kings and persons of the court. Fortunately other texts found at Ebla in western Syria (excavations of P. Matthiae) as well as at Tell Beydar in the Khabur (excavations of M. Lebeau) have provided concordant and synchronic evidence for the beginnings of a political history, with lists of kings and indications of conflictual relations between Ebla and Mari, with victories by one or the other. Among the known kings of Mari were Iblul-Il, Enna-Dagan, Hida'ar and Ishqi-Mari, the latter probably the last of the dynasty, of whom we have two statuettes and several seal impressions.

Setting aside certain affirmations that have been made, for which the evidence is not all in agreement, City II was probably destroyed by Naram-Sin (rather than earlier

by Sargon of Akkad) during his great re-conquest of the western and northern regions of the empire. Sargon was probably happy just to take a tribute from the city. Several archaeological indications point in this direction; the level of the palace where signs of a violent destruction were found (a destruction of which the Akkadian kings boasted) is the level in which were discovered not only the seal impressions of Ishqi-Mari, the last known king of Mari (except for Mir Dagan, referred to in the poem "the general insurrection against Naram-Sin" in which he was defeated by the king of Akkad; he could have been the successor of Ishqi-Mari, but no historical source confirms his existence), but also typical Akkadian pottery which could not have been found in a level destroyed by Sargon.

# WORKS OF PREPARATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF CITY I



- sequence of operations:
- general levelling?
  - tracing of the circle of the exterior dike
  - digging of the linking canal
  - stones brought from the digging of the great canal (Darnai) and construction
  - clayey stones brought for the dike
  - clayey stones brought from the raising of the ground level of the city

Figure 20: Simplified section of City I of Mari.



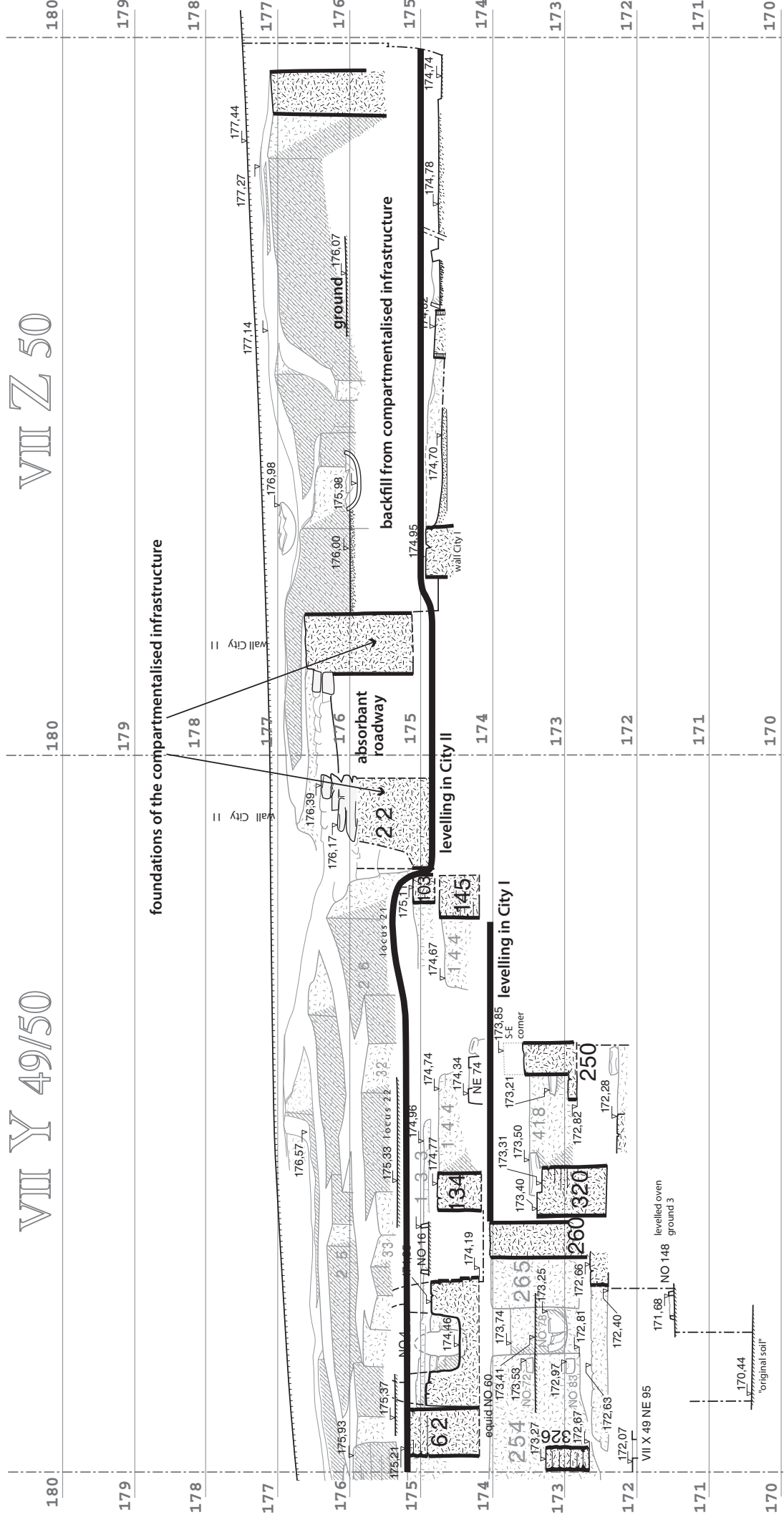
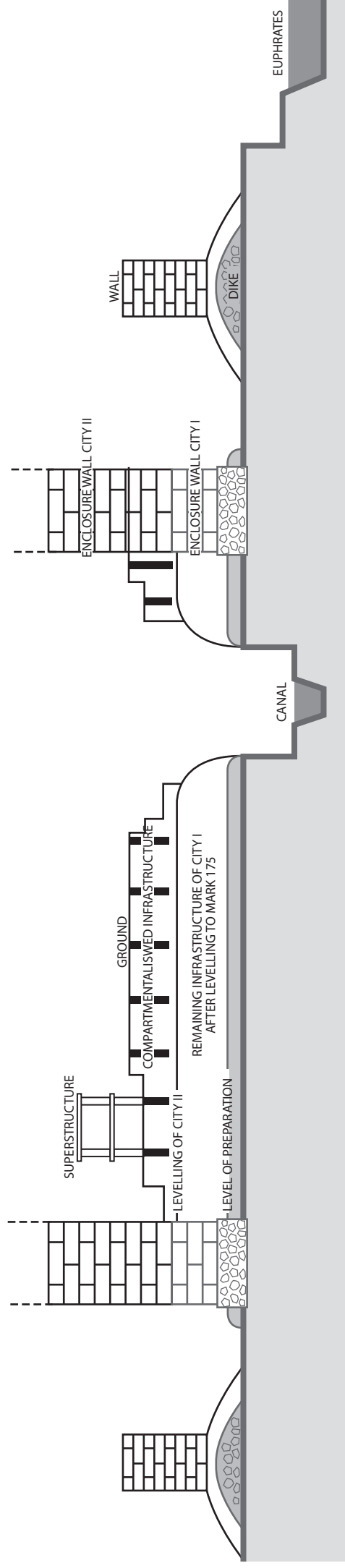


Figure 21: Part of the large section made across the site showing the contact between City I and City II on both sides of the street of the Souk; the levelling at mark 175 is particularly visible.

## BUILDING WORKS OF CITY II ON THE LEVELLED REMAINS OF CITY I



**sequence of operations:** - levelling of City II to mark 175

- general levelling
- construction of foundations (compartmentalised infrastructure) with establishment of street network
- filling of spaces of compartmentalised infrastructure with absorbant materials for the streets
- at ground level, construction of superstructures

*Figure 22: Simplified section of City II of Mari on the levelled City I.*

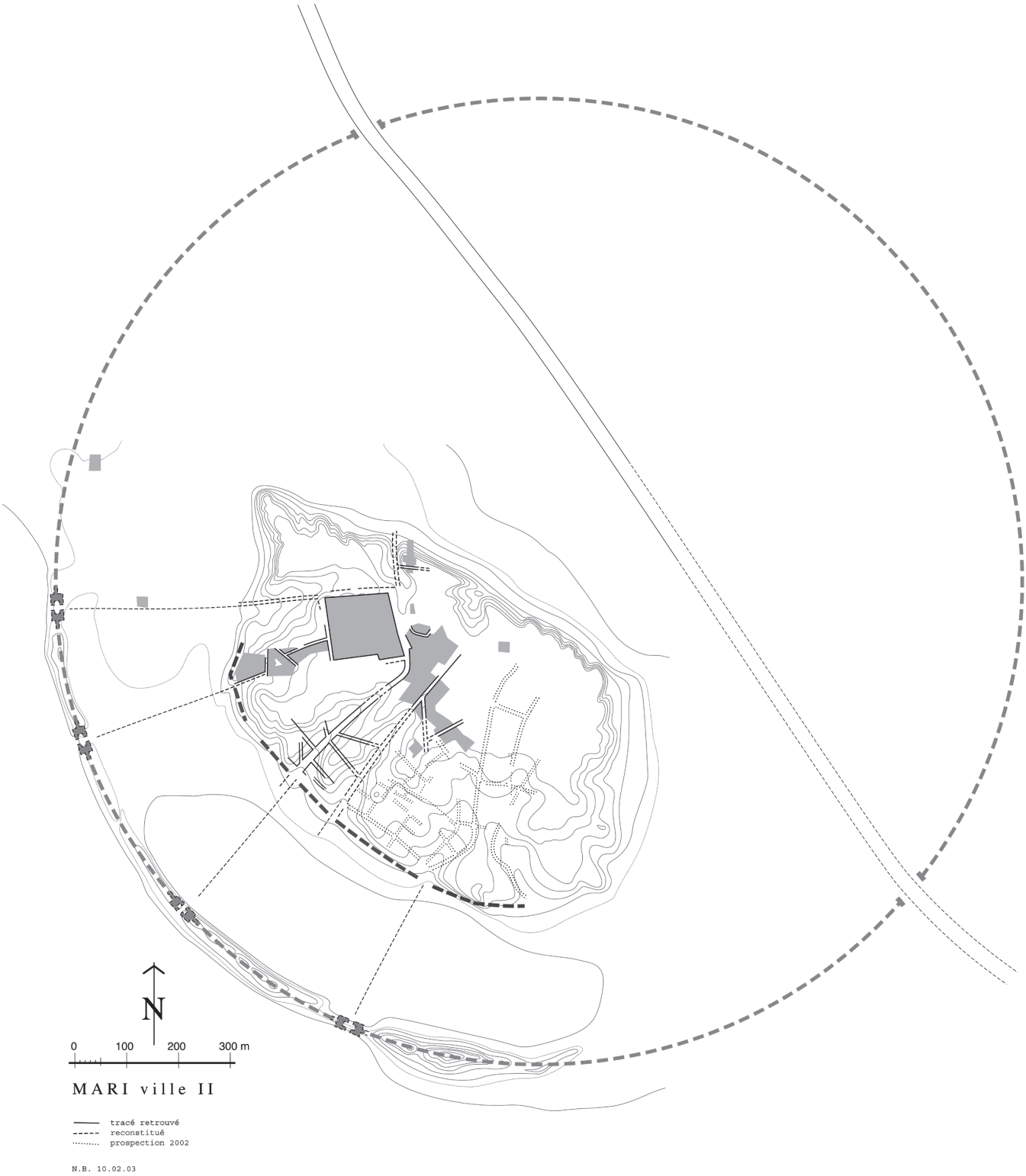


Figure 23: The remains of City II in relation to the original layout.

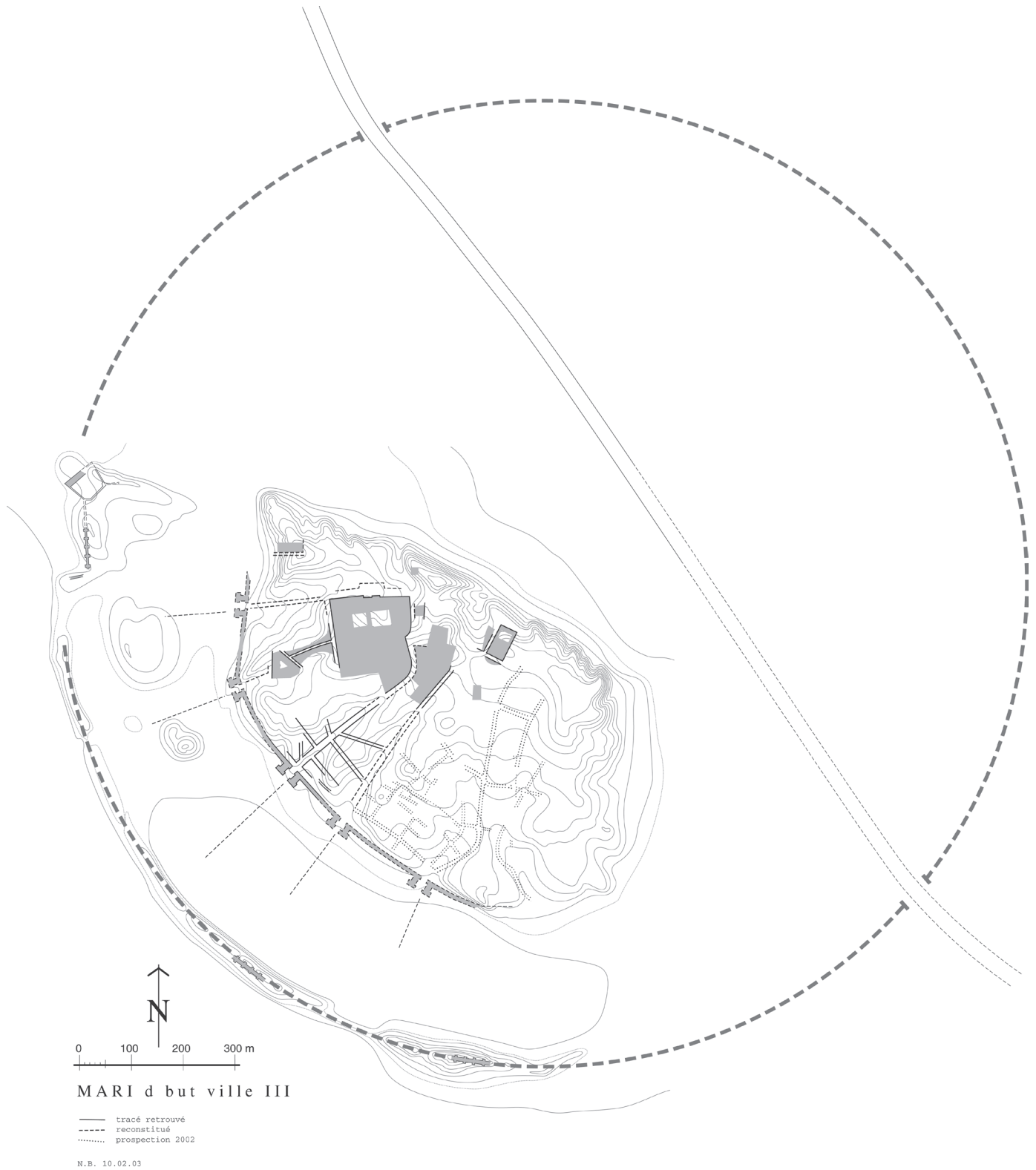


Figure 24: The remains of City III in relation to the original layout.



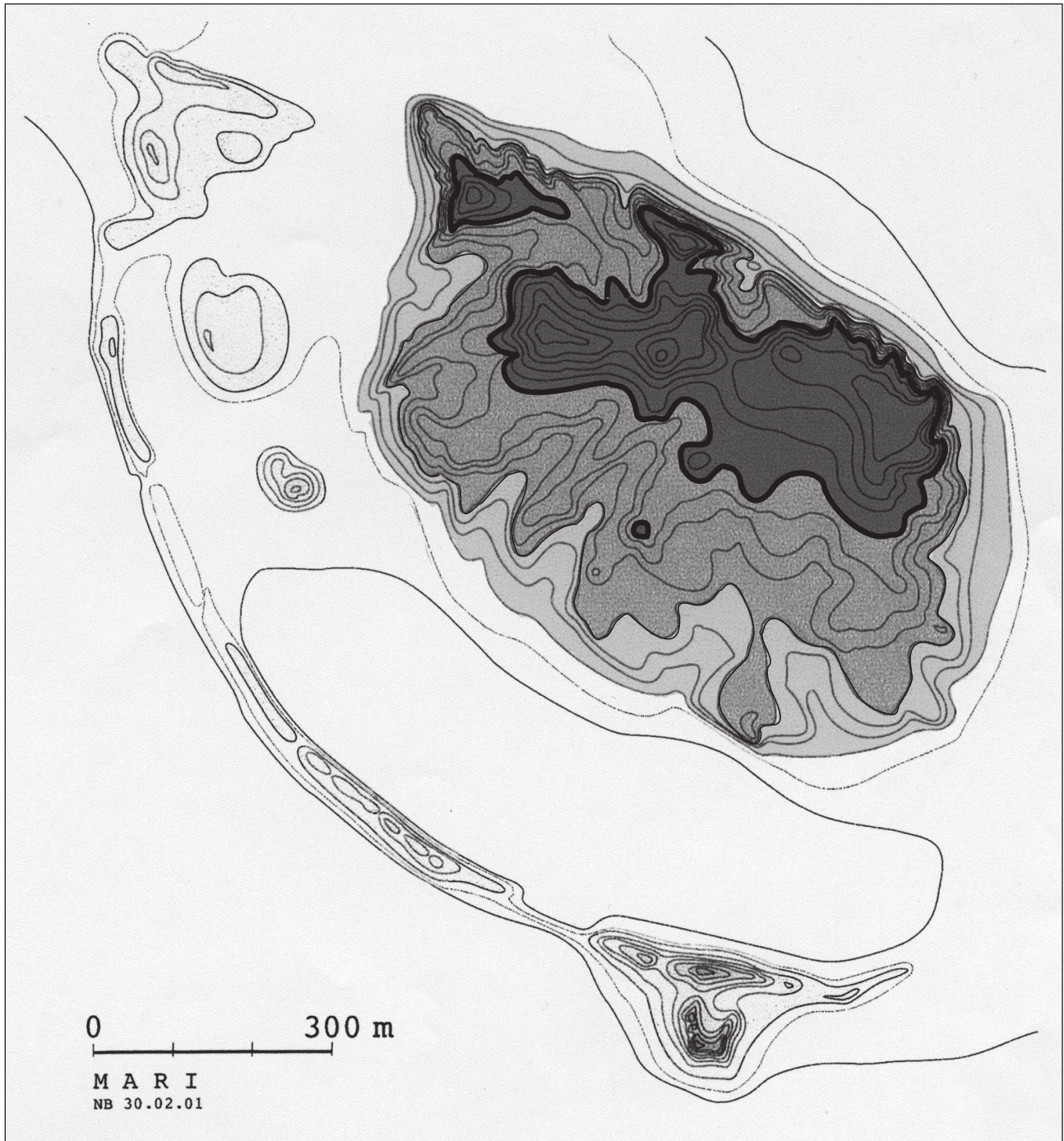


Figure 25: The planimetric superimposition of Mari's three cities. City III is reduced to the topmost zone of the tell (the palaces and the religious constructions). All around, in a crown, the layer of City II extends farther on all sides at a lower level. On the lowest level, the fringe of City I appears at the edge of the erosion of City II.

### The reconstruction of Mari and City III (*Shakkanakku* and Amorite periods, 2200–1760)

The city called City II was systematically destroyed. All the temples, public buildings and dwellings were discovered in a state of having been destroyed by fire, and many important objects were found in them: the famous statues of the king

Lamgi-Mari, the administrator Ebih-II and the precentor Ur-Nanshe, remains of mosaic panels, stone vessels, some of which are sculpted, valuable exotic shells, bronze tools and receptacles, various objects in precious metals.

The general reconstruction of the city was carried out by the new dynasty of the *Shakkanakku*, probably installed by Naram-Sin to govern the city; the end of Akkad meant

that this dynasty gained its freedom. The palace was restored without waiting for the full renewal of the city, and then a new palace was built before being replaced by the Great Royal Palace which lasted until the end of the history of Mari. The entire religious centre was rebuilt, new temples constructed, a new High Terrace built. In these reconstructions and creations the acts of particular *Shakkanakku* may be seen. New principles presided over the architectural organisation, but the city continued to follow the main principles of City II (fig. 24).

Thousands of tablets were found, particularly in the palace, but sometimes also in houses. Some groups belong to the period of the *Shakkanakku*, but most date to the last fifty years of the history of Mari. They relate to administration, but also to communication; the life of the kingdom under the Amorites is the most clearly illuminated, but that under the *Shakkanakku* is beginning to emerge.

Although we have a certain number of kings' names for the *Shakkanakku* dynasty, the history of this period of two or three centuries remains very little known. Relations with the princes of the third Dynasty of Ur were clearly very close, which indicates matrimonial alliances; as Mari and Ur shared Mesopotamia, the former dominating the north,

the latter the south, without such alliances there would have been permanent conflict, which the two powers appear to have avoided, at least until the collapse of the southern kingdom (about 2000 BC), which was followed by bitter rivalries between the cities of the south and ended with the rise to power of the kingdom of Babylon.

The last fifty years of Mari, during which large residences and dwellings were built, are particularly well-recorded in the texts and it is possible to glimpse the main lines of the history of the city, in a weakened position at the end of the *Shakkanakku* period. It was coveted by a kingdom of upper Mesopotamia under the energetic action of Shamshi-Addu, then taken over by a branch of the legitimate dynasty in the person of Zimri-Lim with the help of the kingdom of Aleppo.

It is under this dynasty that Mari was last active; with the Amorite sovereigns decline began, and when Hammurabi took the city and burned it down in 1760, the end of the city was sealed. Because of the destruction by fire, thousands of tablets were preserved in the ruins, causing this period to be over-valued because it has produced written evidence (fig. 25).



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## IV. The three cities and urbanism

### **Morphological analysis of the tell (fig. 26)**

The Euphrates today flows about 2 or 3 km north-east of the site. Is this separation between the city and the river a late phenomenon, following a progressive displacement of the river since the second millennium, which is the usually accepted explanation? The fact that the city and the river were closely linked originally, because the river was the reason the city existed, does not imply an absolute juxtaposition. To understand the original situation, it was necessary to call upon a specialist in fluvial geomorphology, Bernard Geyer. The topographical analyses of the tell were thus complemented by geomorphological analyses, and from this combined approach a new explanation was produced which is far from the one accepted until recently.

Three different observations were made based on the analysis of the topography.

First, it is the perfectly circular shape of a portion of the present-day tell that is striking. The exterior belt fits exactly into the line of a portion of circle whose centre is located very slightly outside the northern edge of the tell. The impressively large excrescence in the south-east (Tell Hariri Zrir, or little Tell Hariri) is a late addition applied against the belt, and is therefore not an anomaly.

The north-eastern and eastern edges are absolutely straight and form an angle that is incompatible with the line of the river and the establishment, in a concave bank, of a harbour.

Finally, the morphology of the main tell is characterised by a dissymmetry which is not explained by what is known about the formation of tells. The band at the top, lying west-east, where the temples and palace are located, illustrates this imbalance, its northern slope being very steep and its southern slope very gradual. The conclusion of this morphological analysis is double: it is highly probable that the city at its beginnings was established

with a circular plan, its original shape, and that the rectangular sections or cuts at the edges of the main tell are the result of erosion which has affected the northern and eastern parts of the original city. The plan of the city in its entirety can no longer be found and thus it is upon incomplete information, as so often in archaeology, that the research depends.

### **The defensive system and its development**

The line of small hills that constitutes the exterior belt of the ruins was very quickly interpreted to be the remains of the ramparts of the city. However, the texts of the period of the Amorite dynasty speak of two ramparts, information that appears to corroborate the traces of an imposing wall, visible on the ground after rain at the exterior edge of the main tell (fig. 27). Thus there would have existed a complex system of two concentric lines of defence, an exceptional feature at the beginning of the era of urbanisation.

### ***The defensive system at the time of the foundation***

#### **The first enclosing wall (figs. 28, 29)**

In 1997 a trench excavated nearly to the base of the constructions provided a complete section of the exterior wall.

At its base an earthwork was found, with a remaining height of about 1.50 m and a width of about 8 m with a slightly unsymmetrical profile, that is, a slope steeper on the exterior side and gentler on the interior face. This earthwork was formed of yellow clay very similar to the natural silt; clearly this was not a rampart, but an embankment or dike. At the heart of this mass a kind

Figure 26: Topographical analysis of the tell of Mari.

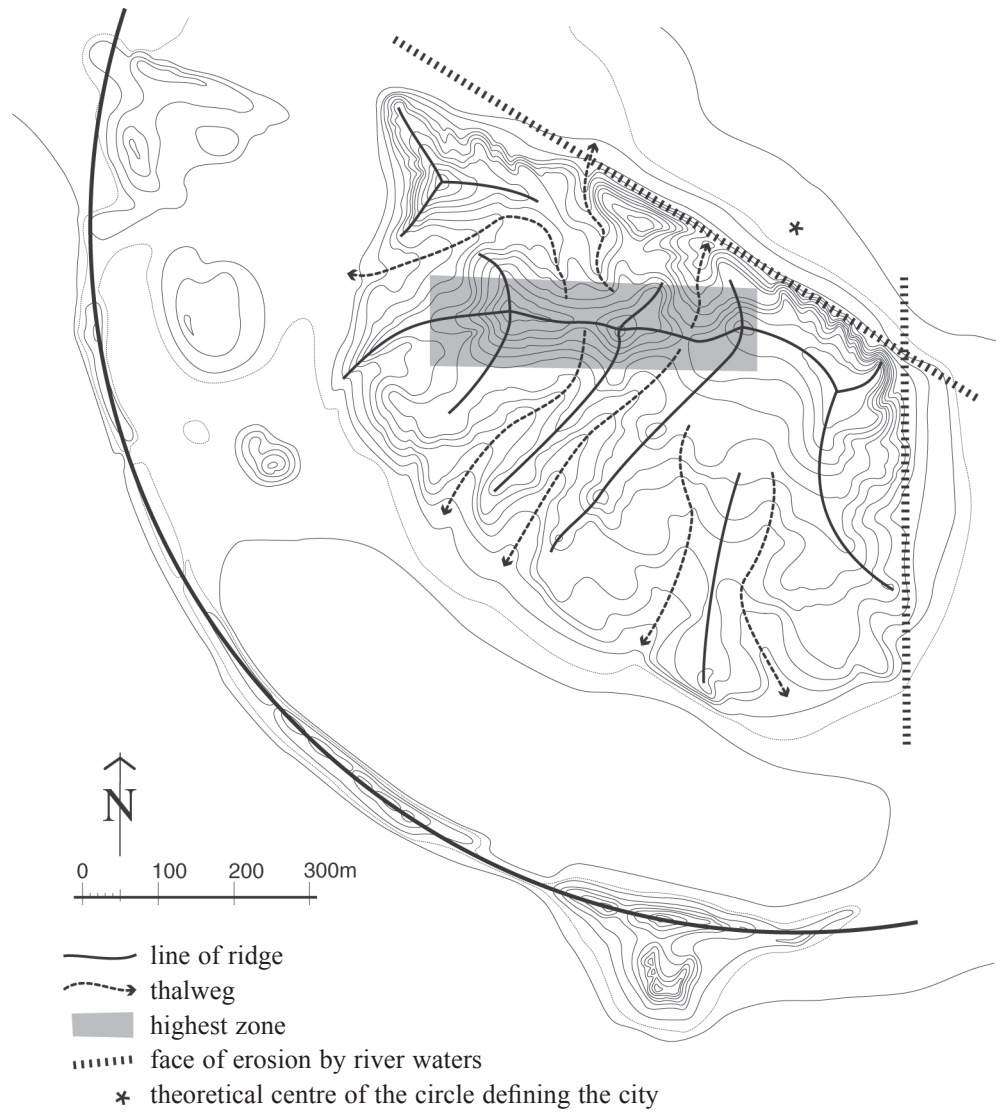


Figure 27: Foundations in mud brick of the interior enclosing wall of City III.





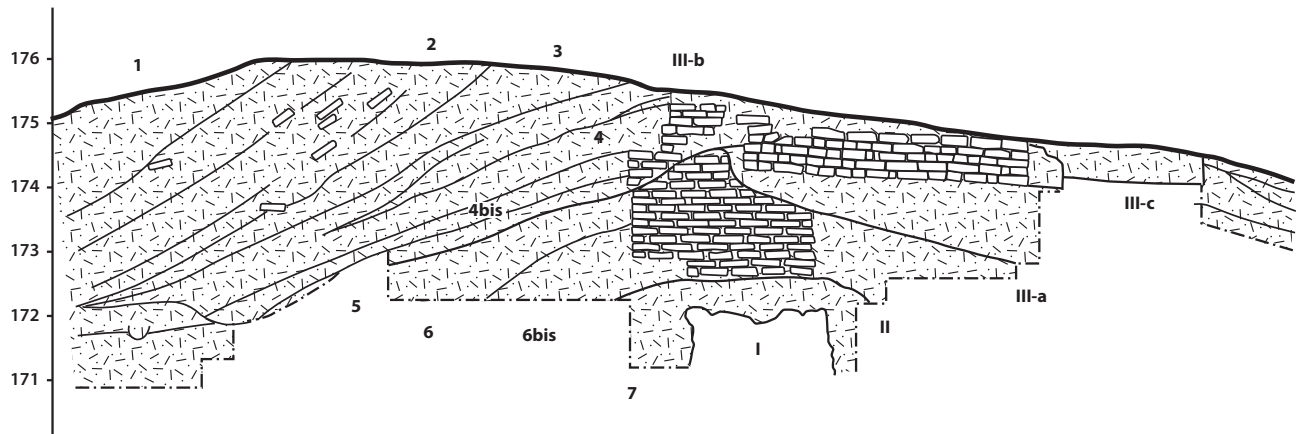


Figure 28: Section across the dike-rampart which reveals the three urban phases, with the dike at the bottom.



Figure 29: Section across the exterior dike-rampart.

of stone wall had been built, relatively well-made on its external face, but very badly executed elsewhere, internal cavities causing it to be less strong. This wall is only 1 m in height, and a clay earthwork lies over it, in which may be seen scattered bricks sometimes laid horizontally but without mortar, well-defined courses or efficient masonry. Was this a wall built above the stone foundation whose

original top has disappeared, or was the stone construction a core designed to give the embankment more stability? Both solutions are possible; however, as the defensive capacity of a wall 1.90 m thick is not a strong one, the “embankment core” hypothesis (fig. 30) is the more probable, although the presence of a wall above it, like that of City II later, is not totally impossible.



*Figure 30: The stone core of the dike.*

An important conclusion thus stands out in this research: during the foundation of the city, a circular dike was built to enclose and protect the urban installations from the risk of floods; a light defensive system could have been added to this primary function, but this does not represent the main reason for this construction. It was to dominate the urban structure up to the end of the history of the city, especially

when the defensive role took on greater importance, but the initial function remained invaluable (see City III).

#### **The interior enclosing wall (fig. 31)**

Research on the interior wall was undertaken between 1997 and 2000. A very fine enclosing wall (total height of the



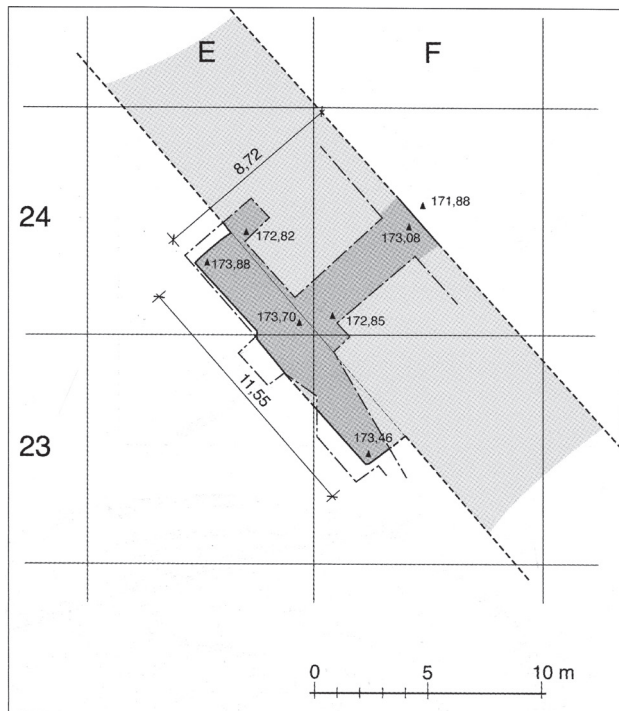
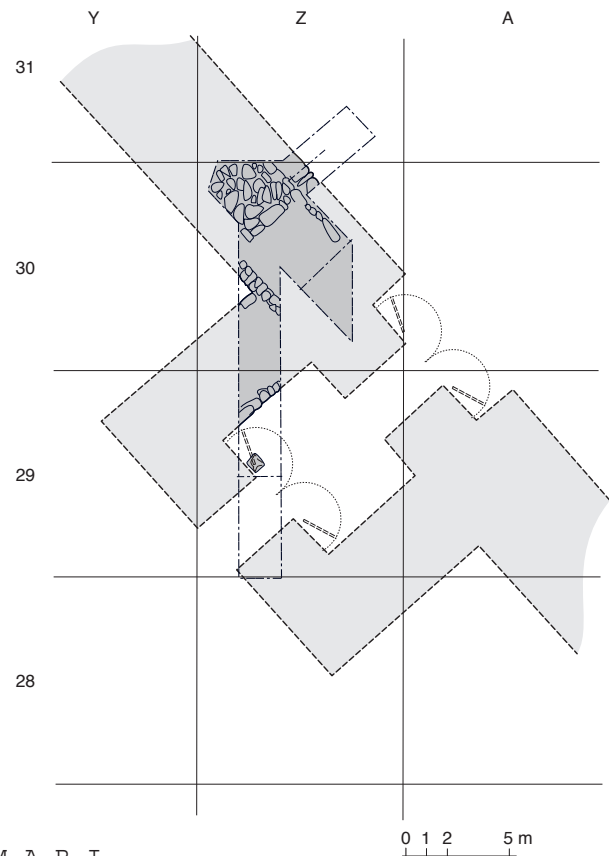


Figure 31: Section of the interior wall of City I with its stone base and the stone foundation of a tower.



Figure 32: Foundations of the gate of City I.



M A R I  
chantier J  
porte ville I (hypothèse retenue)  
d'après relevé 1999  
NB état au 14.06.01

Figure 33: Gate of City I.

wall preserved: 2 m) was revealed that was constructed at the time of the foundation of the city. This was a wall of mud brick built on a solid stone base 1.40 m high; it is 8 m thick at this place, but was preceded by a tower projecting 2 m, 11.55 m long (two rods according to the ancient measurement), seated upon a stone base higher than fifty cm; the rampart was thus 6 m wide. These observations are essentially confirmed in another trench excavated at the location of a city gate (fig. 32).

Thus a wall with projecting towers, set upon a solid foundation reinforced at the place of the tower discovered, enclosed what may be called the inner city, or according to the eighteenth century BC texts, the high city. Given its width, its height would have been about 8 m, affording good defence.

#### A city gate (fig. 33)

Trench J-3 revealed the west stile of one of the gates of City I, with a simple tenaille and a vestibule projected outward, which probably measured 7 m (?) by 4 m with walls more than 4 m thick (fig. 32).

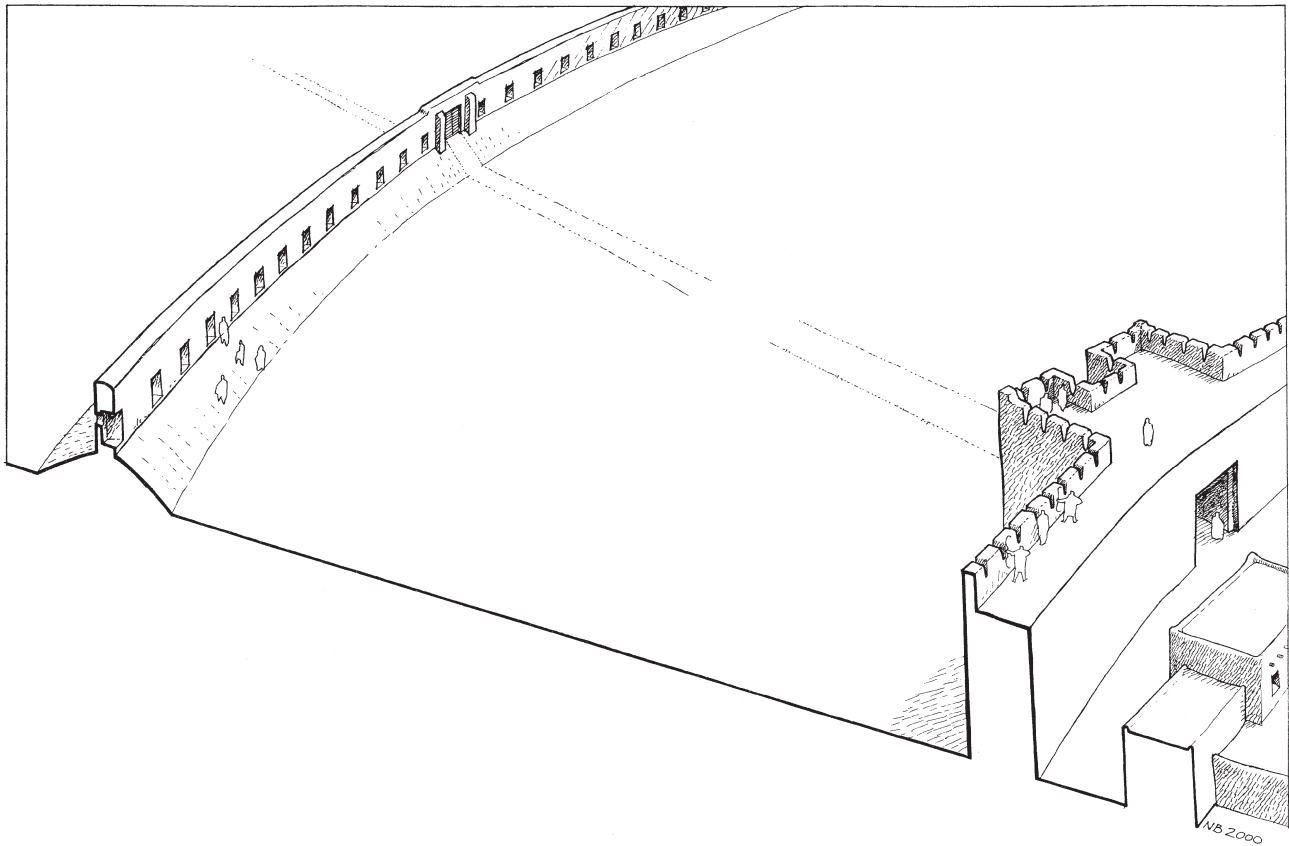


Figure 34: Organisation of the defensive system of City I and City II.

This gate, located exactly beneath that of City III, clearly demonstrates the permanence of the urban organisation.

### Conclusion (fig. 34)

The defensive system created by the founders of Mari consisted of a circular protection against floods, with possibly a light defensive line on top, 1900 m in diameter, and concentrically within this circle a true rampart, 6 m thick, about 8 m high and 1200 m in diameter, with towers and gates, that protected the constructed and inhabited city itself.

But why was there a ring 300 m wide between the protective dike and the rampart? It is known that in the eighteenth century BC part of this space was occupied by gardens, and there is nothing to deny this being the case at the time of the city's foundation. Is there any significance in the width of 300 m? It may correspond to the use of the composite bow in the third millennium (exemplified by an archer shooting with such a bow on an engraved plaque from Mari [fig. 163], and the weapon of Naram-Sin on his stele). The strength and precision of this bow rendered it very efficient and deadly at several hundred metres rather than a few dozen. Could the distance of 300 m correspond to the range of a row of archers shooting a precisely aimed rain of arrows from the ramparts of the inner city on attackers if they crossed the outer embankment/dike (fig. 35)?

### The defensive system of City II

During the entire history of the city of Mari, the original features of the defensive system remained practically the same. At the foundation of City II, the ramparts were reconstructed on the remains of the earlier construction; the embankment/dike and the interior rampart would certainly have been still visible in the landscape, because the new builders rebuilt exactly upon them, simply following the original line.

Why such permanence? Was it simply to maintain tradition? Or was the original territory of the city, once founded and consecrated to a divinity, considered to be an immutable space? Does this permanence imply a constant human presence on the site, even if minimal, between the end of City I and the founding of City II? Perhaps original inhabitants still present on the site simply decided to reconstruct their city, possibly on account of the bad condition into which it had fallen.

### The exterior embankment (fig. 36)

The exterior embankment or dike was consolidated on its inside and outside faces and raised. A wall, clearly present as it was found preserved to a height of almost 2 m, was built on this embankment. With a thickness of 2 m at the spot where the archaeological trench was excavated, the



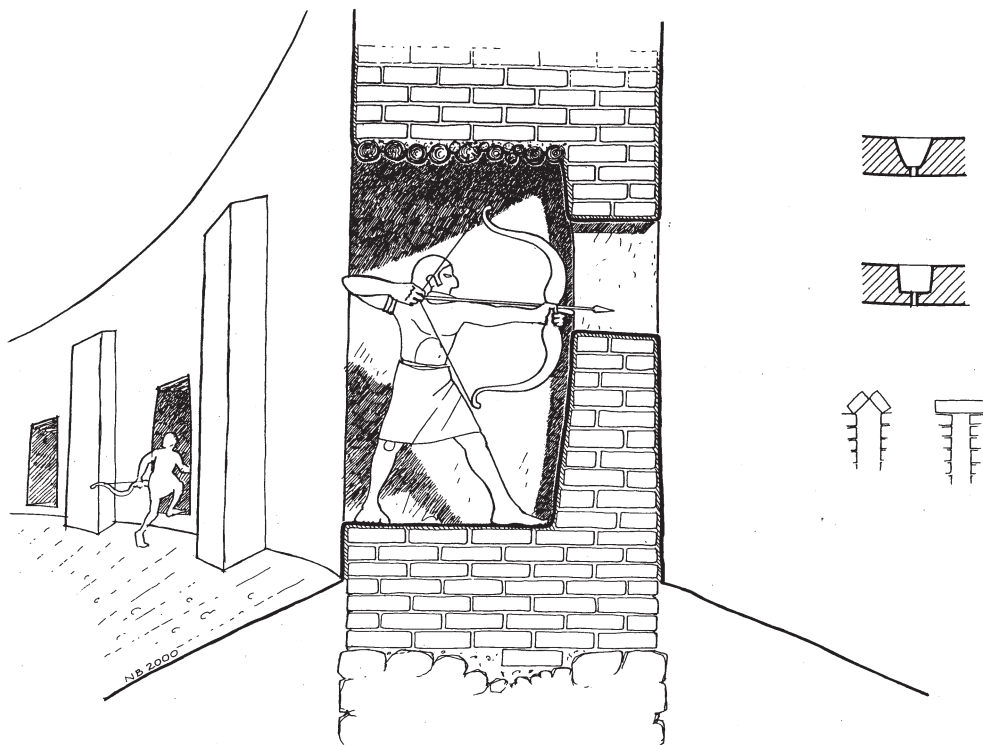


Figure 35: The role of the wall surmounting the dike for the archers of City II.

wall was reinforced on its internal face by an abutment, which strengthened the whole. This 2-metre thickness is not indicative of a defensive role, as such a wall would need to be 6 m thick at least to be effective.

### The interior rampart and the gate (fig. 34)

Only fragments of the wall were found as it disappeared for the most part when the foundations were dug for the wall of City III. At least 6 m thick, it matches the wall of City I, confirmed by the portion found next to the temple of Ishtar.

Also because of the foundation works for City III, no element of the gate has survived. It is however obvious that it existed, as those of City I and City III were found, and the street that served the gate, running from the centre of the city, was in use during the three periods of occupation, clearly shown by the magnetic survey carried out in the spring of 2001.

### Conclusion

Thus the defensive system of the second city took over in part the same base as that of City I, with some additions, including raising the height of the embankment, now certainly surmounted by a narrow wall that formed a first line of defence, although rather weak. What was its function?

Its thickness of 2 m, not counting the abutment, would not have been a real obstacle during an attack, especially as it was too narrow to be built to a height that could prevent scaling ladders; it was also too narrow to install a protective walkway or patrol path to enable rapid movement of the defenders in case of attack. It thus offered no particular defensive feature.

Could it be viewed as a simple obstacle against attack by cavalry? But in this period neither horses nor camels were used, and a mounted attack with donkeys is not plausible.

This is a wall that hardly seems to have been protective, unless it was pierced at regular intervals by slits for arrows, the only reason for a defensive function in the system. In this case it would have served as a first line of defence, to rebuff attack at a distance determined by the arrows' trajectory, intended to protect the space between the embankment and the interior rampart.

The distance of 300 m between the two lines, which corresponds to the possible use of the composite bow beginning with City I, would have enabled good defence of the entire ring between the two walls; the exterior wall with arrow slits would have widened the protected area towards the exterior of the city. And if the assailants possessed the same bow, which is probable as it has been found to have been widely represented already in the Mesopotamian world for several centuries, this wall would have forced them to raise the shooting angle, to aim higher in the air, as seen in the plaque from Mari (fig. 163), and thus to lose efficiency.

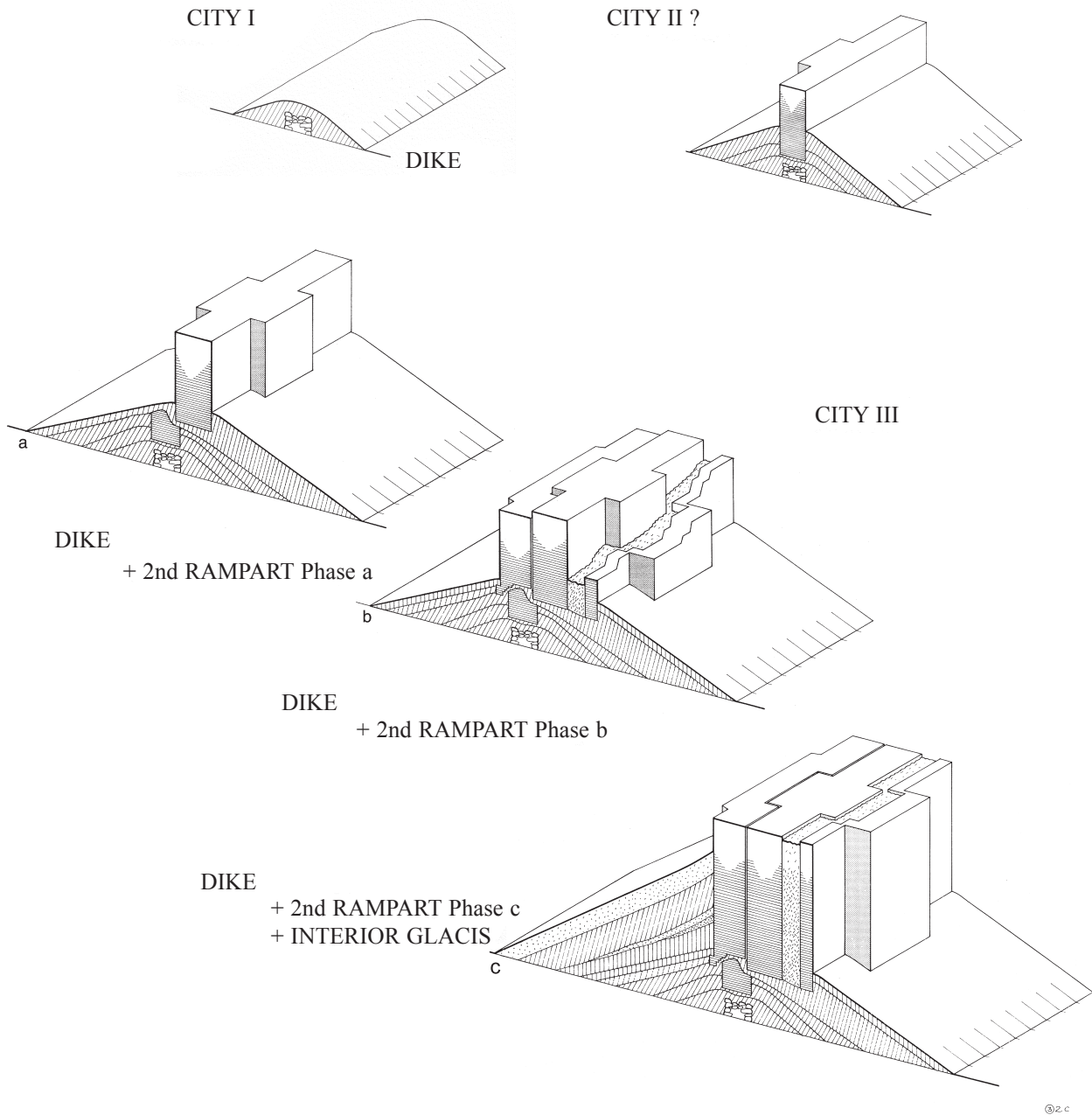


Figure 36: From dike to rampart: evolution of the exterior defensive line from the foundation of City I to City II.

Although this wall appears to have been weak, it probably played a particular role in this double defence system, impressive in its rationality if this analysis is justified.

### *The defensive system of City III (figs. 37–40)*

It is not known exactly when the *Shakkanakku* proceeded to reconstruct the defences of the city, so it is probable that they were seriously damaged by Naram-Sîn, the destruction of the ramparts having been highly symbolic and the most significant act of the defeat.

### **The exterior wall (fig. 36)**

The embankment was again reinforced and raised. Slightly shifted to the south, a new wall with characteristics very close to that of City II (2.40 m thick) was built with a group of abutments both on the exterior side and the interior side, each projecting 1 m, which made the thickness at those points 4.40 m.

After this first phase of reconstruction, it appears that the builders carried out a drastic transformation by laying a backing of about 2.20 m thick immediately against the interior façade, and by building on the exterior façade a copy of this wall, following the contours of the abutments.

The difference with the backing on the interior façade is that a jacket of about 1.40 m thick was left to be filled with earth, between the old exterior wall and the new. Thus in one or two stages, a wall 2.40 m thick became a wall more than 7 m thick and even 9 m thick at the abutments.

This operation profoundly modified the system: a screening wall, which may have provided some protection against raids by maintaining the attackers at a distance, but in the case of a siege would only have provided a delaying function, was transformed into a true defensive wall, as large or perhaps larger than the interior rampart of the first city and able to repel a besieging army. It would have been possible to establish posts on its top for defence and for archers, while behind soldiers would have been able to move quickly to reach a threatened sector.

Thus Mari was protected by a double wall, exterior and interior. Such reinforcement, tripling the thickness of the original wall, was certainly the result of a change in the nature of warfare between the cities and the anticipation of increased danger on the part of the inhabitants of Mari.

Obviously gates would have existed in the exterior wall. None have been excavated, but their emplacement can be inferred from the lowering of the line of the ridge in front of nearly all the large radiating streets.

### The interior rampart

The importance given to the exterior rampart in no way diminished the interest of the rulers of the city in the interior rampart. That of City II had certainly suffered from the damage inflicted by the victorious army of Naram-Sin. The point in time when its reconstruction began is not known, any more than for the exterior wall; it appears only that it was decided to build big and start at zero.

The new wall was built on the ruined wall of City II, sometimes with a very slight shift in position (figs. 27, 32, 38). A general cleaning to remove the piles of earth from the ruined wall would certainly have taken place. It is possible that this earth was used to fabricate new mud bricks. Then a foundation trench was dug, into which the infrastructure of the wall was inserted; these foundations reached, at least in some places, a depth of more than 2.50 m (zone J-3) and a thickness of nearly 10 m. It is highly probable that this wall was 11.50 to 12 m in height and that it was constructed all the way around the city.

To give an idea of the size of this construction, some figures: for a trench 1 m long it was necessary to build about 100 m<sup>3</sup> of masonry, with bricks of about 40 × 40 × 12 cm, some fifty bricks per metre, 5000 bricks per trench, thus for the length of the interior wall, about 3.14 km, one billion 570 million bricks!

Only a very powerful authority could have carried out such a building program.

### The gate at the end of the Great Way (fig. 37)

Only the foundations of the gate at the end of the wadi of

the Great Way have been found: a construction projecting more than 25 m outwards and with a double closure. This infrastructure must have supported a mighty defensive gate, which corresponds to iconographical evidence from Larsa (fig. 39) as well as to the Palmyra gate at Dura-Europos.

An important modification was made, probably under the Amorite dynasty, to the double rampart reconstructed with great care by the *Shakkanakku* (figs. 40, 41).

### The contribution of Yahdun-Lim (fig. 42)

On the disc found in the palace, Yahdun-Lim boasts of having constructed the rampart of Mari: "I built the wall of Mari and I dug its ditch" (translation of Sollberger and Kupper 1971, p. 244). This is a good example of why the texts should be interpreted with caution, as archaeology has proven without a doubt that the walls of Mari were reconstructed by the *Shakkanakku* and that it was not necessary to carry out construction of the defences of the city when the Amorite dynasty came to power. We know that the term used may be translated as "reconstruct" as well as "construct", and this is the sense that should be understood here. Should the installation of the interior embankment of the exterior wall be attributed to Yahdun-Lim? This is a possibility but the work may have been carried out under a preceding king of the dynasty or even by Samsi Addu.

### Installation of an interior embankment

A last contribution to the exterior system of defence was the installation, against the interior face, of an embankment consisting of loose elements, very gravelly earth, gravel and small pebbles. According to the slope of this embankment, seen in the section of a trench, its minimum height against the internal face of the wall is 7 m; it may have been as high as 8, 9 or even 10 m.

The size of this construction may be comprehended through the fact that it would have necessitated using 1000 donkeys every day for 3000 days, that is, more than 8 years, to bring the material from the fluvial terraces near Mari. This is another example of the means available to a king of Mari powerful enough to carry out an operation that he deemed necessary.

### The reasons for this development

This first evidence for such an embankment, not long after the reinforcement of the exterior wall, indicates that it was necessary to suddenly and profoundly transform the systems of defence, as though new dangers threatened.

The first step in the development of the defensive system, the transformation of a thin wall into a massive rampart, was enough to ensure an efficient defence against enemies with horses, whose introduction to Mesopotamia would certainly have constituted the major influence on this development. Probably the pressure from the Amorite

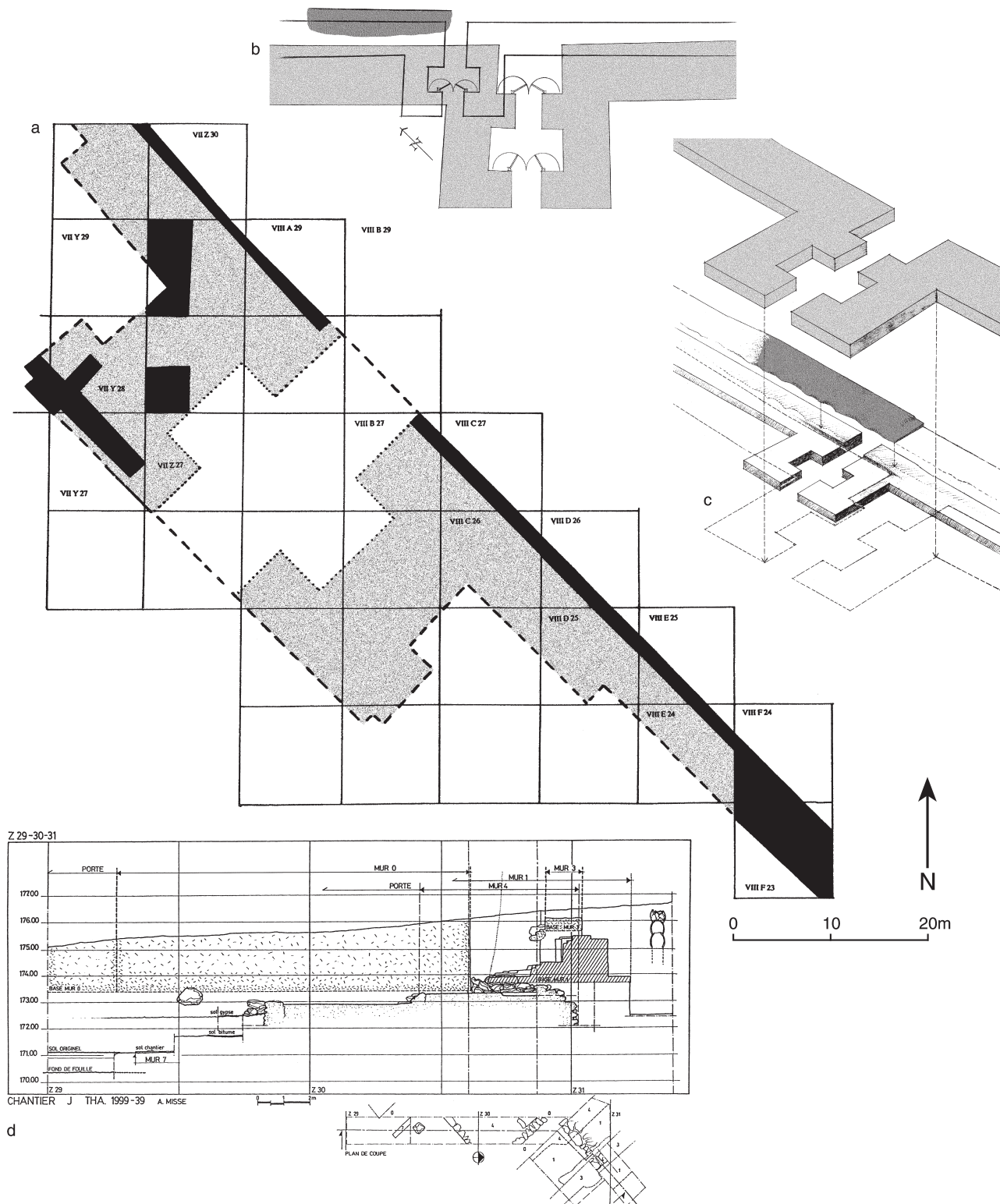


Figure 37: Evolution of the gate of City I to City III.

tribes that occurred under the *Shakkanakku* led to the transformation of a simple wall into a rampart.

The second intervention, the interior embankment of the exterior wall, implies another danger, as it was built not to reinforce the thickness of the enclosure wall, but

in case of a successful breach, to prevent the enemy from passing the barrier of the wall. At the moment when the enemy succeeded in piercing a tunnel in the constructed wall, the heterogeneous mass of gravel and pebbles would collapse into the tunnel, blocking it and preventing any





Figure 39: Representation of a city gate surmounted by a divinity (terra cotta piece from Larsa).

further advance by digging. The exterior enclosure wall was thus transformed into a veritable rampart.

Such a defence could only have been conceived as a decisive innovation in the context of siege techniques; in particular, certain texts indicate the use of well-developed siege machines that enabled digging of a tunnel at the base of a wall thanks to a protective covering.

Thus the beginning of the second millennium is that of great change in the techniques of defence and attack of cities.

### The ramparts and the texts

Archaeology easily explains the words *adashshum*, *kirhum* and *kidum* encountered in the texts, which designate the ramparts as well as the urban spaces within.

The exterior rampart is the *adashshum*; it defines the “lower city”, which lies between it and the second rampart, a space sometimes called the “ring”; the interior



Figure 40: The defensive system, end of City II/beginning of City III.

enclosure wall is the *kirhum* and the space within it is the “upper city”; the *kidum* extends beyond the *adashshum*, the exterior rampart; in this system, “the middle rampart” should indicate the *kirhum*.

The gates of the city, named in the texts, were certainly those piercing the *kirhum*. There would necessarily have been gates in the exterior wall, although erosion prevents these being defined; however, for most of them their location can be found in the continuation of the wadis that follow the radiating streets that end at the interior wall. These are the Gate of Itûr-Mêr, the Gate of the King, the Bab Khinim, the Gate of Dagan and the Gate of the Khabur.

This very strong system of defence is expressive of the role the city played; its inhabitants believed themselves secure behind its walls.

### The urbanism of City I

#### The base level

The level at the foundation of the city, which is situated at an altitude between 171.29 m (in J-4) and 171.80 (in the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct), is identified

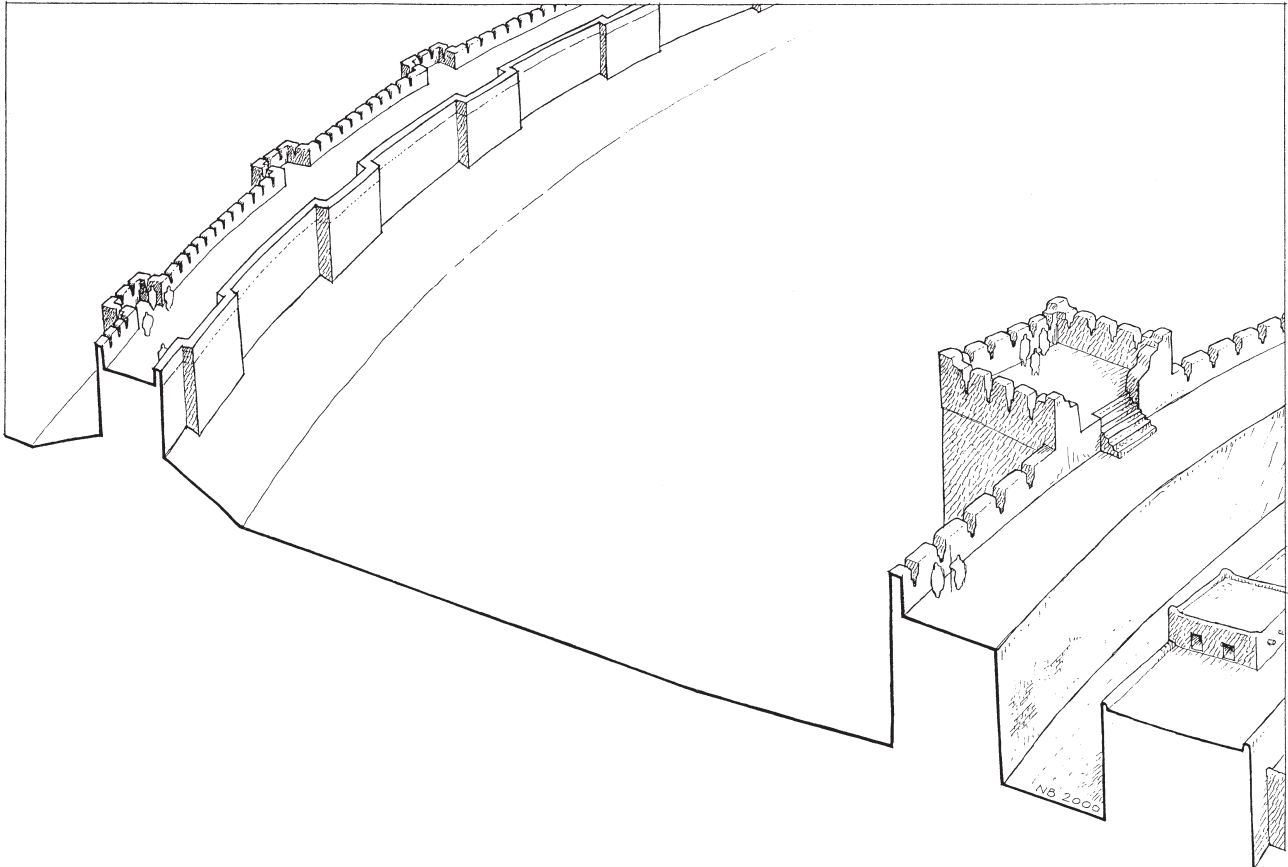


Figure 41: The defensive system during the construction of a true rampart.

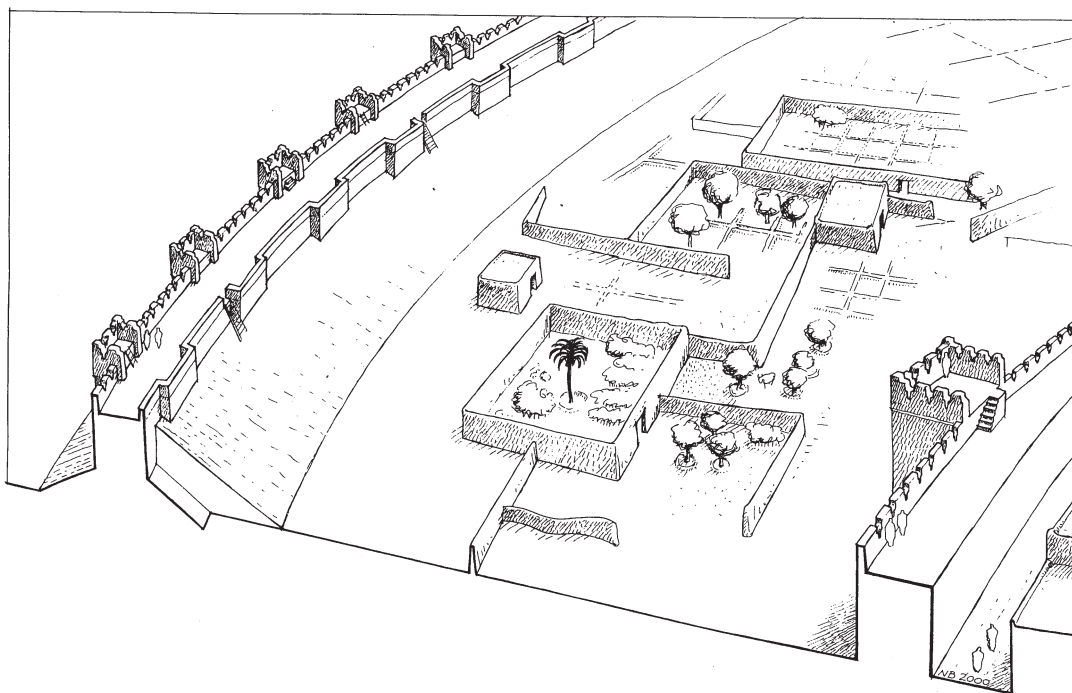


Figure 42: The defensive system with the glacis and the gardens at the end of City III.





*Figure 43: First level of earth brought to the base of the city into which the foundations of the Building with Stone Foundations of City I were sunk.*



*Figure 44: First level of earth brought to the base of the city, excavation area B.*

as a silty brown-yellow earth that corresponds to the earth covering the Holocene terrace. It is most often present at the beginning, several centimetres thick (up to 80 cm or 1 m under the Palace central space of the Sacred Enclosure), a series of very regular horizontal strata, with surfaces sometimes marked by ashes (excavation area B, Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct, H, J). These strata contain very little material, and the ashes do not appear to have come from a fire, but rather from an intentional spreading as though to separate the strata with this material. This would have been an intentional layer to distance the first occupation level from the natural surface, which was very close to the water table and thus exposed to humidity (figs. 32, 43, 44).

### ***Trenches and locations not followed up***

The level of City I was accidentally reached by André Parrot under the temple of Ishtar, in a few trenches (first trench in December 1933 in the north of the tell containing stone tombs, within the Massif Rouge, in a pit of the temple of Shamash) and three times since 1979 before the existence of this first urban period had been defined (in excavation area B, at the bottom of the shaft of the entrance passage of the royal tomb of the Little Eastern Palace, and under the floor of the palace of City II).

### ***The principal known quarters of City I (fig. 45)***

#### **The quarter of the Building with Stone Foundations and its development**

This quarter is situated between the interior rampart and the street that separates it from excavation area L. Excavated between January 1934 and 1937 (under the temple of Ishtar), with trenches dug in 1997 and 2000, it has provided the first level of the city over a surface area of about 30 by 50 m. A re-examination of the stratigraphy defined 4 phases belonging to City I and thus anterior to the temple of Ishtar.

The Building with Stone Foundations (phase 1) occupies most of the surface area cleared as it is large; however, its relation to the urban space around it cannot be well understood as two (if not three) of its edges and its entrance are not known (fig. 46).

For altimetric reasons, a terrace of large gypsum stones is attributed to phase 2; this terrace extends between the Building with Stone Foundations and the rampart, but neither its function nor its role in the urban space are understood.

Phase 3 is characterised by a total transformation of the architecture and surface occupation, consisting of several small (about 10 m per side) mud brick houses (all incomplete). The collapse in this level led to an elevation of at least a metre, which indicates a dense network of

houses, perhaps with first storeys. It is on an eroded surface of this layer that the earliest level of the temple of Ishtar was established.

Finally, three stone-built tombs, vaulted and corbelled, were built in a later phase, but still anterior to the foundation of City II. They have caused serious disturbance in the stratigraphy, aggravated by a trench dug into the Very Sacred Place of the temple of Ishtar by the builders of City II.

### **City I in excavation area B**

At least eight architectural strata were discovered in the large trench at the northern edge of the tell under the level of City II (House of Artisanal Installations). Because of the narrow width of the trench, no complete house was found and no indication was obtained on the integration of these levels of architecture in the urban space. Given the scarcity of coated surfaces found, it can be assumed that these strata correspond to foundations. The first level of the city was clearly defined (fig. 44).

### **City I under the palace of City II**

#### ***I. A CENTRE FOR METALLURGY IN THE EXCAVATION AREA PALACE CENTRAL SPACE (PCS) OF THE SACRED PRECINCT***

Under the central space of the Sacred Precinct of the palace of City II, a trench produced a very surprising stratigraphic sequence dominated by artisanal activities in which metallurgy held a major role from the earliest installation. Given the context, a temple or a palace had been expected to be found. Very few architectural elements were discovered, but many quite complete metallurgical installations (fig. 47), hearths and potters' kilns were brought to light.

This trench also provided facts of great importance for the understanding of the site. First, the area that became, with the construction of City II (middle of the third millennium), the most sacred place in the city with its great sanctuary had been during the first part of the existence of Mari an area for artisanal activities; nothing now enables us to know whether it was associated with a temple or a palace, or whether it was independent. Second, the stratigraphy indicates that this workshop area had been, over a long period, clearly specialised in metallurgy. At the beginning of the Bronze Age such an activity throws particular light on the fundamental functions of the city, the reasons for its foundation and its regional and interregional role.

Finally, the transition from City I to City II did not take place simply or gradually. There is a break in the stratigraphy; besides the fact that the last layers of City I appear to have disappeared, there is no destruction layer, but rather a stratum formed by intentional levelling. The hiatus between the two cities is very clear, even though its duration is not easy to determine.



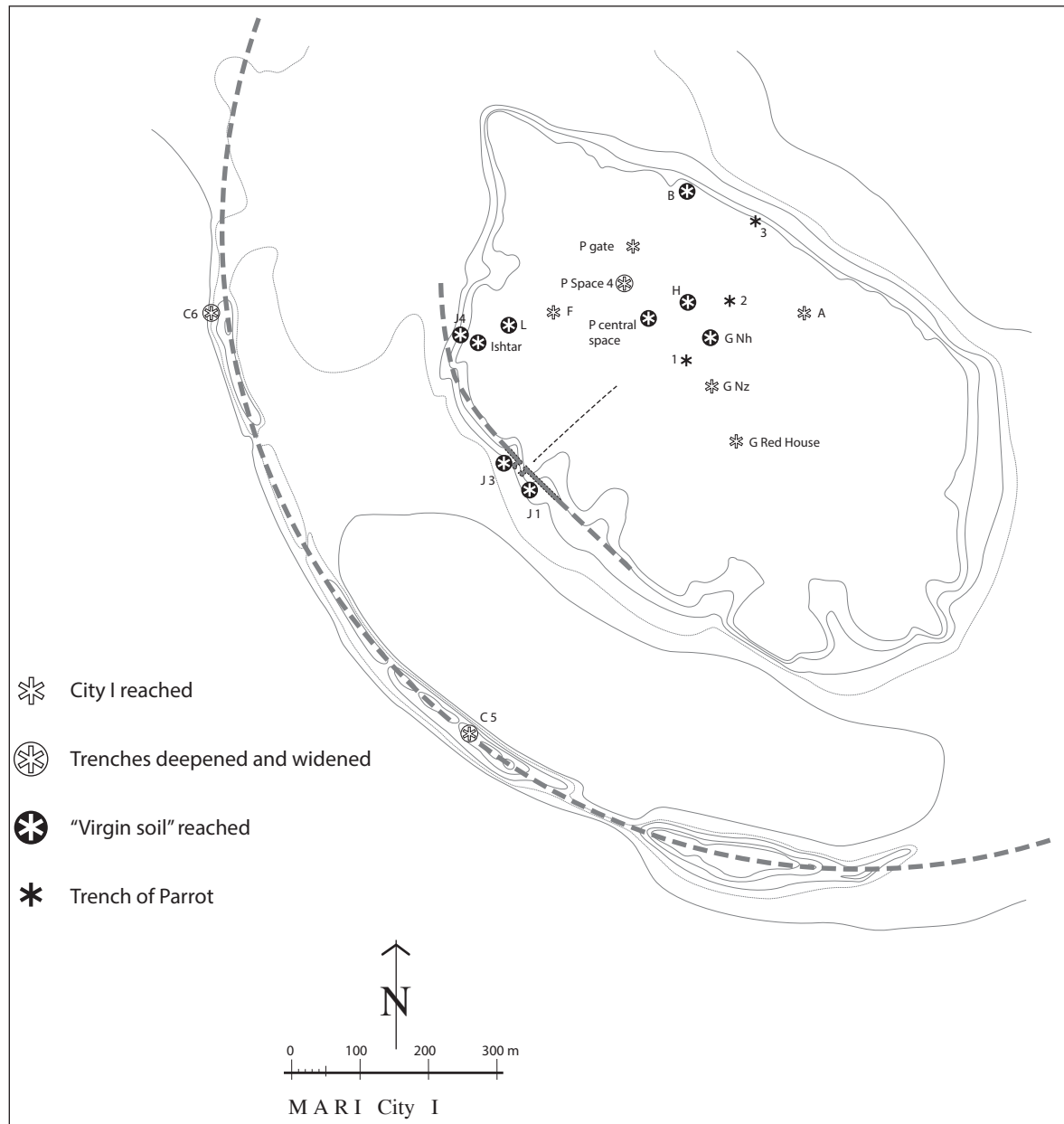


Figure 45: Locations where evidence for City I was discovered.

## 2. EXCAVATION AREA H

This trench, excavated in 1995 east of the palace of City II, near the Sacred Precinct, was intended among other reasons to determine how far the zone of metallurgy workshops of City I found under the central space of the Sacred Precinct (City II) reached; did it continue beyond the excavated sector or did it end approximately there, at a point where other constructions began? We observed that on the 9 floors defined, 8 were associated with architecture. It thus appears that this is not the same situation as in the central space of the Sacred Precinct; in less than thirty metres, a workshop zone changes to a habitation zone with no important buildings.

## 3. TRENCH P-4

Like excavation area H, this trench, opened in 1999 in Space 4 of the mid-third-millennium palace, was intended to reveal whether the craftsmen's quarter found in the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct extended thirty metres to the north. The first preserved level, which should correspond to an intermediate phase of City I, consists of a large rectangular room with a door, of which one of the floors was covered with objects and pottery, among which a vessel of Nineveh V was found. In an area that extends to the north-east of the room (an exterior space?) a metallurgist's hearth and a tomb were revealed, all associated with low walls. The situation is thus very close to that of the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct.

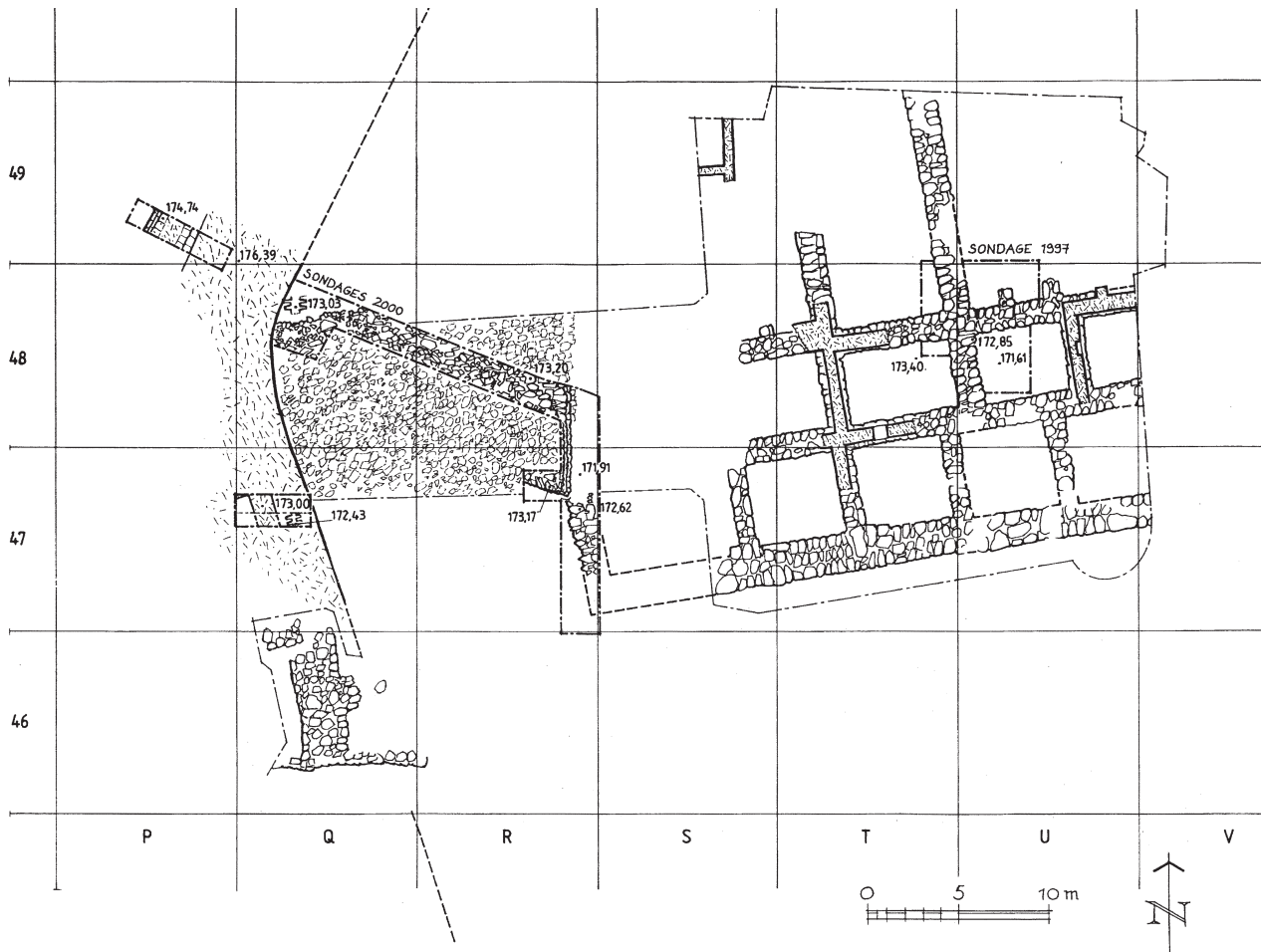


Figure 46: The first level of City I under the temple of Ishtar, Building with Stone Foundations.

However, the large room introduces a noticeable difference, and although the artisanal function is still present, it is possible that that the organisation of this space differs from that of the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct; moreover, whatever the nature of the architecture found, it is difficult to infer that it belongs to a public building.

There is thus still uncertainty concerning the institution upon which depended the artisanal activity of the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct and its environs.

### City I under the sector of the temples

#### 1. DISCOVERY OF THE TOP OF CITY I UNDER THE TEMPLE OF NINNI-ZAZA

During the excavation of a trench under part of the Very Holy Place of the temple of Ninni-Zaza, the top of the first preserved level of City I in this place was found, with architectural elements consisting of parallel walls which do not present a comprehensible whole. But it is clear, as much by the direction of the walls as by their organisation, that the building has nothing to do with the sacred architecture of the temple of Ninni-Zaza.

#### 2. A LARGE MONUMENT UNDER THE VERY HOLY PLACE OF THE TEMPLE OF NINHURSAG

The trench dug beneath the Very Holy Place of the temple of Ninhursang of City II in 1998 and 1999 revealed as the first level of the foundation (alt. 171.56 m) a superb east-west wall preserved to a height of 2.20 m. Its southern façade was decorated with a very fine niche, quite deeply inserted into the masonry and as high as the wall itself, which is at least 3 m thick.

It is not possible to define with certainty the nature of this construction, although clearly it was an imposing monument, whether terrace, temple or palace, which belonged to the earliest level of City I, and its location in the temple sector leads to the hypothesis of a religious building.

### Quarter L

Begun in 1999, the excavation of quarter L continued with the objective of a detailed study of a quarter of City I; it covered in 2004 close to 600 m<sup>2</sup>. Five architectural levels have been defined so far. Several houses were built back



Figure 47: Metallurgical installations of City I (excavation area Pcs under the Sacred Precinct).

to back, opening on two streets, one to the west towards the temple of Ishtar, the other to the east.

Again, the artisanal function appears to have been very much present, and various specialised installations – potter's kiln, bitumen-lined basin for dyeing, other bitumen-covered surfaces, metallurgists' hearths – indicate a zone of craft activities. If the continuation of digging enables confirmation of this interpretation, we will have a completely new vision of the organisation of work in certain cities of the very beginning of the third millennium. A metallurgy workshop with its installations provides an idea of how such work was organised (a vessel of Scarlet Ware type was found on a well-defined floor of level 2 which defines a chronological phase, see fig. 139).

A particularly interesting discovery is a vessel in place that dates the floor of an upper level.

### **Conclusion (fig. 48)**

Although the evidence for City I has accumulated, it is rarely possible, except for the foundation and the defensive system, to define any precise urban features for this first city, although future excavation may eventually fill these gaps. There is no certain temple and no palace, the structuring and street network are practically unknown

(although their traces are apparent later). There is however a clear continuation of certain functions between City I and City II, a diversified architecture, and especially the existence of rich and varied artisanal activities.

The most important discovery is the process of establishment of a new city.

### **The urbanism of City II**

City II is the best known of the three. The builders who took possession of the site preserved some of the features of City I and organised the city according to new plans.

### ***New ideas in an old framework***

#### **An old shape restored**

The builders maintained some of the characteristic features of the foundation city (fig. 23): the circular walls, the double line of defence, the linking canal and the emplacement of the *karum*, the organisation of the street network based on large radiating and transverse arteries. There was thus a partial appropriation by these builders of the conceptions of their predecessors, certainly because the clear advantages of Mari's location had always been understood and the



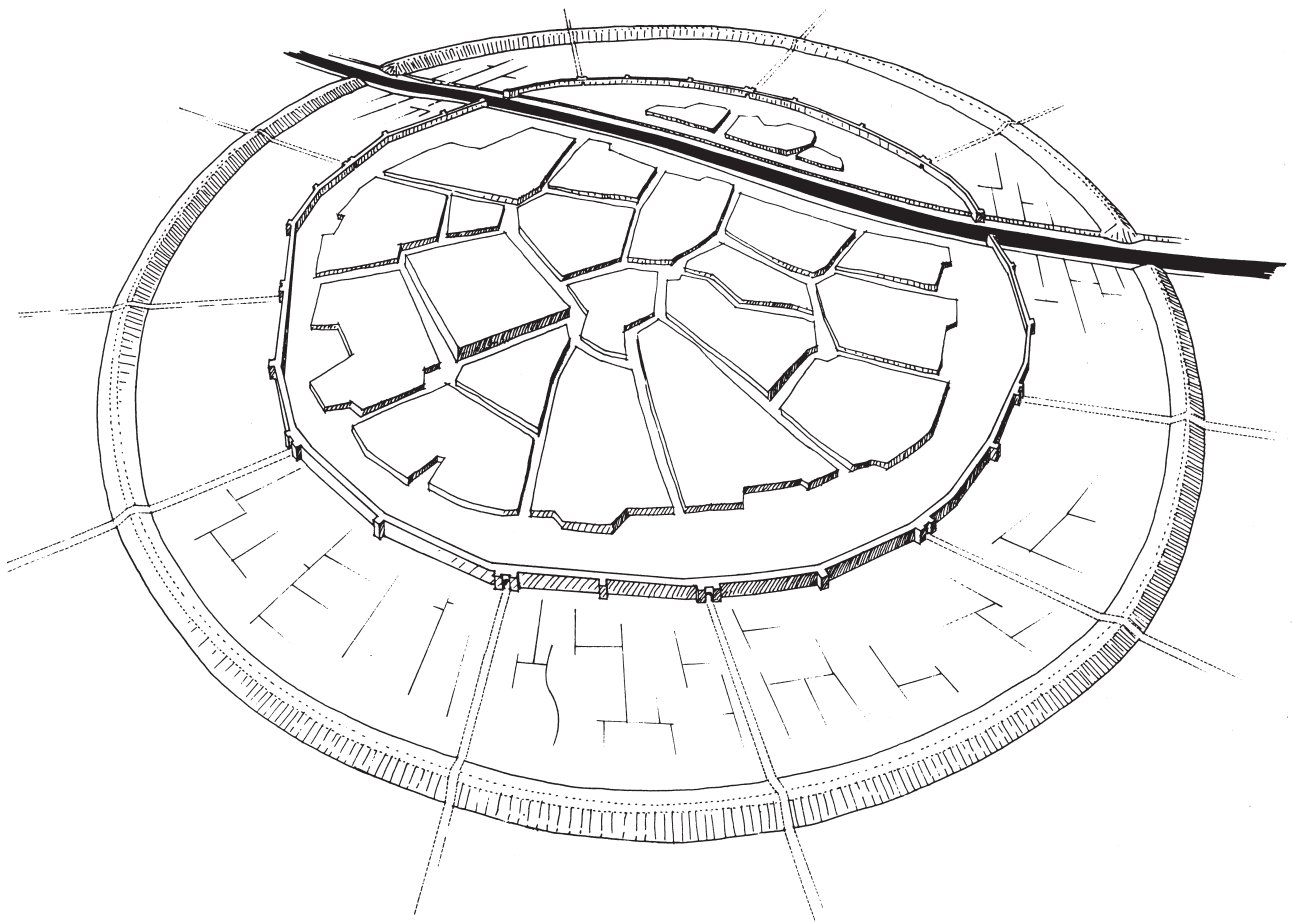


Figure 48: Outline of the reconstruction of City I.

reactivation of the city corresponded to the constraints of a situation which, although not identical, was at least very similar to that which had existed four centuries before.

#### **A new organisation of the city (fig. 49)**

The new spirit manifested itself in the establishment of sanctuaries – the Sacred Precinct, the temple of Ishtar and the temple of Ninni-zaza – in places previously devoted to secular activities, and in the construction of a large palace above a zone where artisanal activities and everyday life appear to have predominated. This discontinuity in the nature of the buildings indicates a break between the two urban phases and a certain lack of understanding on the part of the new inhabitants of the original organisation. There was thus a real transformation of the plan of the city.

#### **A policy of great building works**

The re-founders of the city were not content to just reconstruct buildings. Before dealing with dwellings for men and constructions for the gods, they completely rearranged the very base of the city and organised the street

network to ensure good drainage of water. True planning oversaw the whole of the operation, not surprising for a population which had already demonstrated its capacity to organise the exploitation of the entire region when the city was first founded four centuries earlier.

#### *1. REMODELLING THE BASE*

Before any other operation, the re-founders completely remodelled the base, either by levelling the ruins in place, or by filling in. The intention was to create sub-horizontal surfaces upon which new buildings could be constructed. The real reason for this operation, which is not immediately obvious, is twofold. First, a flat surface was not the main objective, but rather was intended to enable the drainage of rainwater towards the exterior; for this it was necessary that the heart of the city be positioned at the highest point – in some places a height of 175.50 m, a little more for the palaces and temples – and to establish a very gradual slope, hardly noticeable in the occupation levels, steeper in the larger descending streets. Second, it was necessary to lower the general level attained at the end of City I to decrease height differences which would contribute to



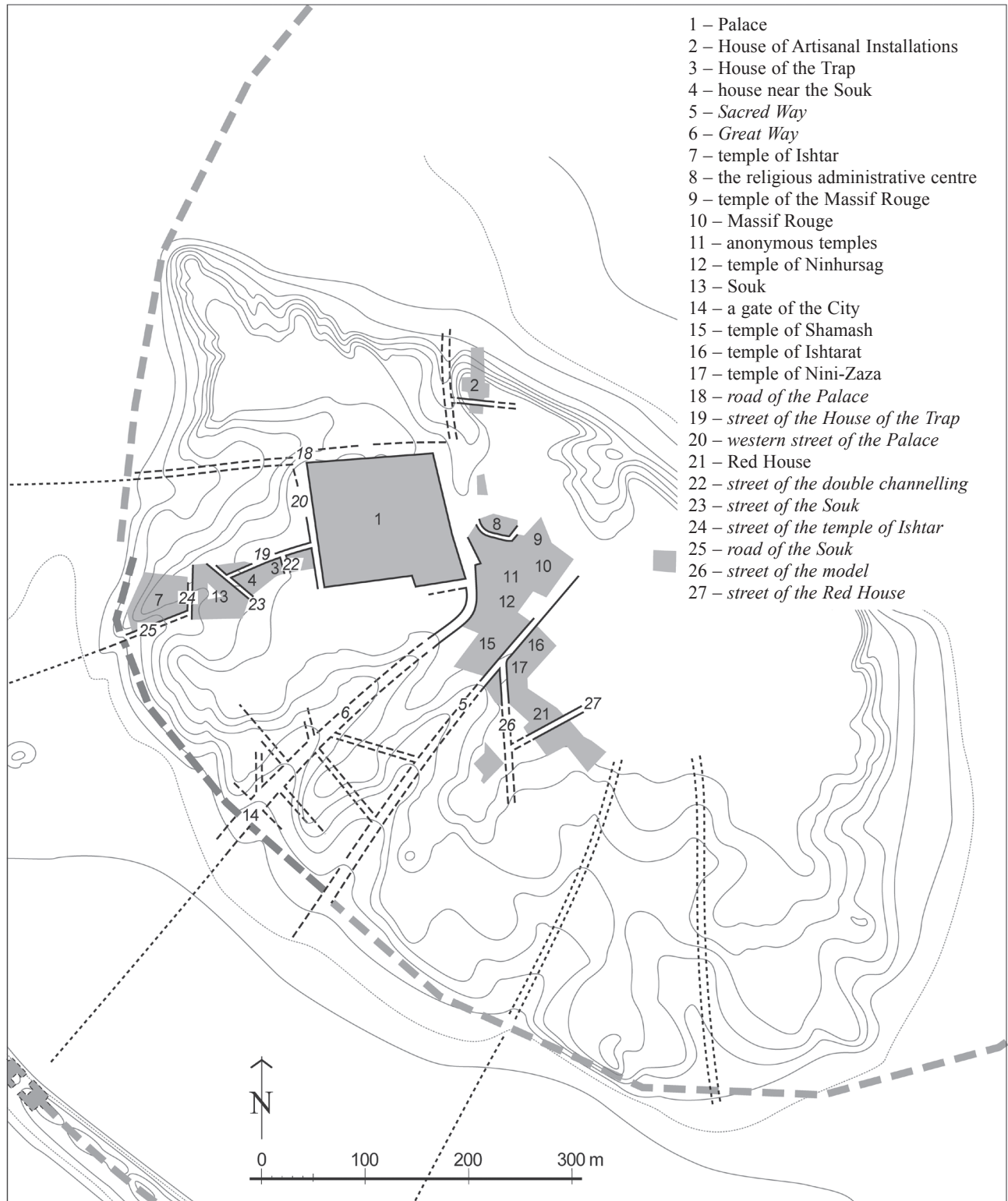


Figure 49: The different monuments and the urban organisation of City II.

serious damage during heavy rains, as the base level was in the heart of the city due to the presence of the canal.

## 2. CREATION OF A COMPARTMENTALISED INFRASTRUCTURE

The remodelling of the base was only the initial step in a much larger operation. The builders of City II decided in fact to build upon the entire surface *intra muros* a

continuous network of foundation walls for the future buildings; in doing so they defined the division of the surface area and organised the entire plan of the city.

Once the walls were built, in several stages for reasons of technical facility, the construction appearing as a continuous chain of uninterrupted walls (except for the placement of streets), coffering was set in place and filled with earth.

The height of these walls can vary according to the role of the final wall (supporting wall or interior cross wall), and the base does not necessarily lie upon the levelled surface, but may be situated 2 m above. This means that between the levelled surface of the highest point of City I and the first occupied level of City II a thick layer of nearly 2 m was laid over the entire city!

However, there is one exception: the infrastructure of the palace of City II was formed by earthworks 1.20 m high (at least), which had the advantage of creating a large supporting surface for the whole building whose height could have reached 10 to 14 m.

### 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STREET NETWORK

In the creation of the compartmentalised infrastructure, special attention was paid to the streets as it was necessary to equip them with a specific internal structure and a particular layout. There was a single motivation behind this: to ensure in the best conditions possible the evacuation of rainwater, so potentially harmful to the city.

To differentiate the streets from the rest of the compartmentalised infrastructure intended to support the buildings, it was necessary from the start to define their layout; the builders thus defined the edges of the streets with foundation walls, often broader and deeper than those of the houses, as they were to support the outer walls of the houses. These walls thus define the width of the streets and their size in the street network.

The next step was to fill in the volume of the infrastructure of the street thus raised, with the main objective of eliminating the rainwater that would necessarily always flow into the streets. The builders chose materials that favoured rapid absorption of rainwater, which would have flowed especially from the terraces: ashy earth, gravels, crushed pottery sherds (fig. 50). The water was thus rapidly absorbed at the surface and eliminated through the sub-surface towards the water table or towards the exterior of the city. It was not allowed to remain to eat away at the bases of the walls along the streets. This is what today would be called modern motorway technology using absorbent materials in the roads.

The general organisation of the street layout appears to have been inherited for the most part from City I, with radiating arteries descending from the top and transverse connecting streets (fig. 49). The large radiating arteries enabled rapid evacuation of rainwater from the centre of the city towards the periphery. The water flowed down the lines of greatest slope and thus could not stagnate on the way.

These large radiating avenues were linked to each other

by transverse streets with oblique layout. These narrow streets, which served the different neighbourhoods, could not be too sloped or the bases of the houses would be attacked by the rushing flow of water. The street which edges the "Souk" to the north has so far provided the best example of this type of "absorbent roadway". This technique was also discovered in the street coming from the Red House to join the main radiating avenue that links the Massif Rouge to the interior rampart. It continued to be used in City III and there are indications that similar techniques existed at the time of City I.

Thus, during the violent rains that occurred in the region, part of the water was rapidly and directly evacuated by the great radiating avenues, while the other part was absorbed into the subsoil of the city and eliminated gradually. The lower parts of the city did not run the risk of being flooded at every rainstorm, nor the houses damaged.

### 4. METHODS FOR ESTABLISHING THE STREET LAYOUT

The archaeological research carried out at the junction of the street of the Model and the radial avenue descending from the Massif Rouge, also an absorbent roadway, provided other important information concerning the topographic methods used by the builders of City II.

Directly below the excavated cut made across the street, large standing slabs (fig. 51) were discovered, some of them higher than a metre and very thin, delineating in a continuous way the contour of the angle block at the southern junction of the two streets. Well embedded in the earth in a flattened level indicating an intermediate phase and not an occupation phase, they do not lean against any wall, as on all sides they were buried in the earth of the fill. Moreover, two of these standing slabs, on each side of the angle, protrude 10 to 30 cm above the level of the street, that is, that of the actual occupation; placed in such a way, they indicate the exact direction of the two streets.

It appears that these slabs were topographic references established to indicate the layout of the streets during the phase of preparing the infrastructure of the level of occupation. Such a practice obviously implies that the organisation of the street network, and thus the smooth running of the city, was elaborated before any construction.

This is new evidence for the quality and the technical knowledge of the Syro-Mesopotamian urban builders in the middle of the third millennium.

### Conclusion: re-foundation with an intentional urban plan

The great extent of the work carried out to rebuild the city of Mari, equal to that demonstrated by the foundation of the first city, is clear from all the evidence observed.

Can the reasons for such a great building project be determined? They are certainly to be found in a vigorous resumption of trade after a long period of inactivity; this enterprise may have simply have been a sudden extension

of the geographical space involved with trade and in particular with the introduction of western Syria into the system. But the extent of the work is stunning: reactivation of the linking canal, certainly at the same time as those for irrigation and navigation, complete reconstruction of the circular protective embankment, rebuilding of the interior rampart, reorganisation according to a preconceived plan of the street network with differentiated treatment of the main avenues and secondary streets in accordance with the problems of evacuation of rainwater, reconstruction of the palace, sanctuaries and residential quarters.

Such an operation demonstrates that:

- the site was empty, or almost, of permanent occupation at the time of re-establishment;
- it could not have been a slow rehabilitation;
- the re-foundation proceeded from a general conception of urban life and from perfectly assimilated principles concerning living conditions in the valley of the Euphrates;
- the means employed were considerable, although in the case of the canals the task was made simpler by the fact that they only had to be cleaned out, not mapped out or excavated.

### **General organisation of the city (fig. 49)**

The diameter of the circular plan of the new city was identical to that of the first, 1.9 km across from edge to edge of the embankment supporting the first rampart and 1.3 km for the city *intra muros*. A continuous band of the city running west-east, some 5 m wide and 600 m long, is known precisely, as examination was made of a cut along its entire length; it runs practically without a break from the rampart that borders the temple of Ishtar to the Massif Rouge, providing very exact information on the articulation of the western half of the city.

#### **THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CENTRE**

The main hub lies in the centre of the principal tell, although this is not the actual centre of the city, decentred because of the canal; the hub is formed by the juxtaposition of the palace and a religious sector, following a fashion that was apparently current in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia.

However, at Mari there is no real bipolarity, as the greatest temple of the city, the Sacred Precinct, was integrated into the palace, which differentiates this palace from the others known thus far in Mesopotamia. However, there does not seem to have been direct contact between this sanctuary and the temple quarter, which does demonstrate the usual bipolarity.

Between the palace and the Massif Rouge, flanked by its temple-tower, a group of buildings developed that at the end of the history of City II was occupied by an administrative centre with its storerooms, which could have been the management centre of the Great Priest, seated at the heart of the religious domain.

The sector of the temples is incompletely known,

because the High Terrace of City III largely covers the obviously large constructions of this phase, and also because the edges of this sacred sector have not been well established archaeologically and perhaps even fluctuated during this period. Excavation revealed in the east the group formed by the Massif Rouge (figs. 52, 85), which was the religious High Terrace of City II, and its temple-tower (fig. 53), for which the eponymous divinity is unknown; in the south the temples of Ninhursag and Shamash were discovered, and east of the Sacred Way, closely associated, the temples of Ishtar and Ninni-zaza were found.

This religious quarter, which presents a real coherence even if gaps exist, is partially served by a great north-south artery, the Sacred Way, which leads to the rampart, although its integration into the street network of the city is not well understood.

### **The Red House and its quarter**

A small quarter in the eastern part of the city has produced evidence of major streets and a house, the Red House (fig. 54), of particular interest as an example of the architecture of this period, but the rest of the quarter remains little understood.

### **The western quarters**

From the western edge of the palace to the rampart, three groups in continuity have been explored.

The sector of excavation zone F, between the palace and the Souk, with a street network, underground channelling and several houses, including the House of the Trap, provides a clear image of a portion of a residential quarter.

Immediately to the west of this group and before the temple of Ishtar lies a very particular quarter, triangular in form because of the street layout and well integrated into the urban fabric (fig. 55). What is most striking is its interior organisation. The triangular plan, due to the street layout around it, is reproduced at the heart of the constructed group and has the aspect of a square, also triangular in form, of which at least two of the three sides are parallel to the streets on the exterior; pillars decrease the space in this square by creating a portico that extends around it, so that only the central part of this square, between 10 and 15 m per side, is open to the sky. At the back of the portico are cells, usually double, which correspond well to what we already know in the Near East – shops in the souks. The identification is fairly obvious. What importance should be accorded to this market? With a maximum of 15 to 20 shops, this group would not have been an economic centre for the city, but could possibly have been a market for the neighbourhood.

At the western edge of the tell, between the rampart and the north-south street to the east that separated it from the Souk, is located the temple of Ishtar, the only known sanctuary that lies outside the sacred quarter; it may have been equipped with a habitation area for certain priests.





Figure 50: Example of absorbent roadway in the street of the House of the Souk.

### The northern quarters

Not well understood, the northern quarters are at the present time isolated in the urban framework and the relation that they had with the centres of decision-making is not clear. The level of excavation area B with the House of Artisanal Installations shows that these quarters could have been economically important with diversified activities, not surprising as the port was probably close by.

Nothing remains of the area of the *karum*, the north and the east of the city having been destroyed by the erosion that followed the ruin brought about by Hammurabi; but it was there that the linking canal passed, the line of which has been determined, and thus the port constructions would have logically been located there. It may be presumed that on either side of the canal were located the quarters related to port activities.

It is clear that the palace, in a dominant situation, opens in the direction of the port zone, a position that favoured provision of water, and especially enabled direct control of an important zone of activity. Clearly the organisation of City II was the fruit of extensive reflection, or rather of the experience of living in a city.

### The ring

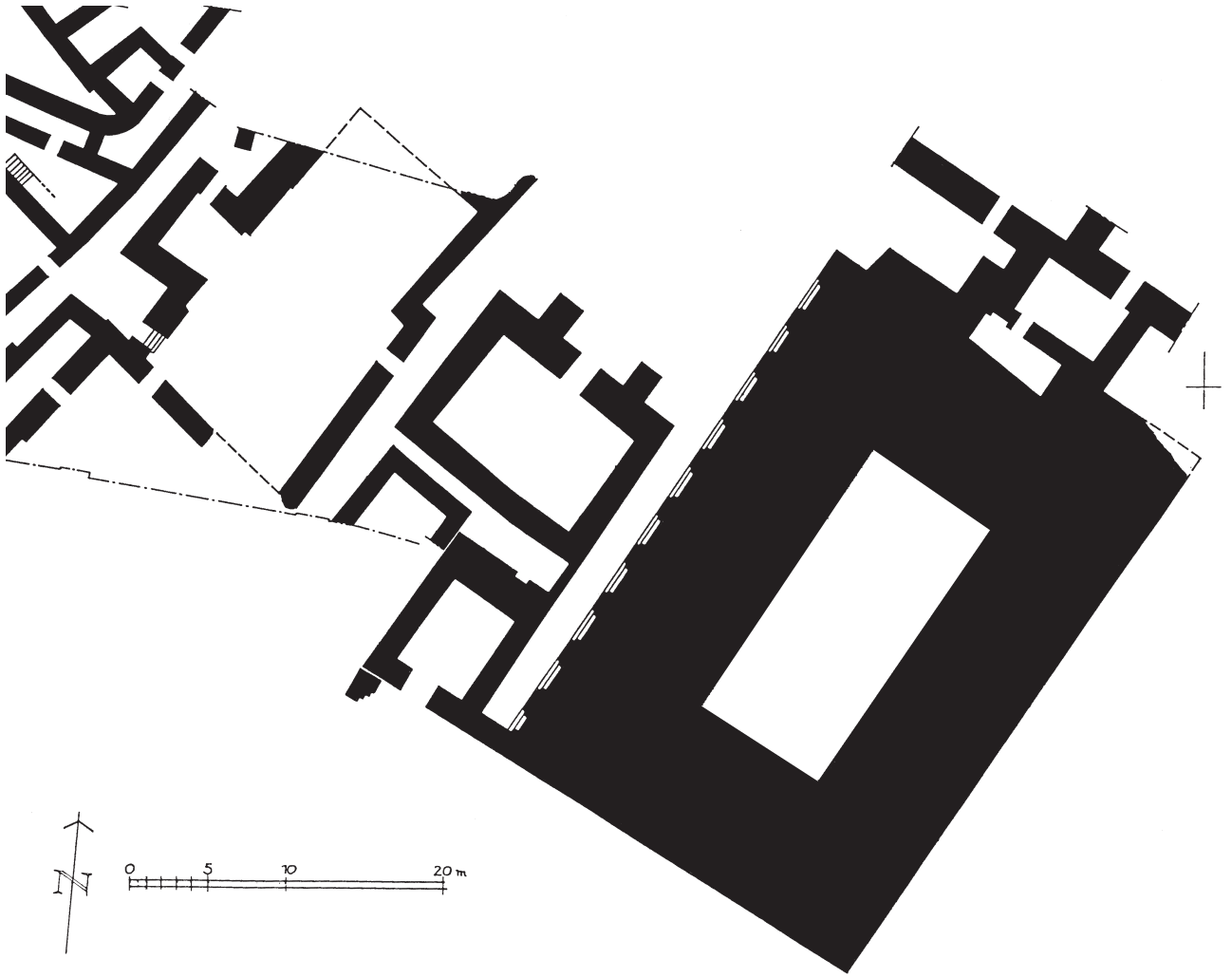
Between the central tell surrounded by its enclosure wall, which was more polygonal than circular, and the clearly circular exterior wall, extended a no man's land, called here a ring. What was the role of this ring?

It was not a bare space; all the southern section appears to be free of any visible installation, and perfectly flat. But

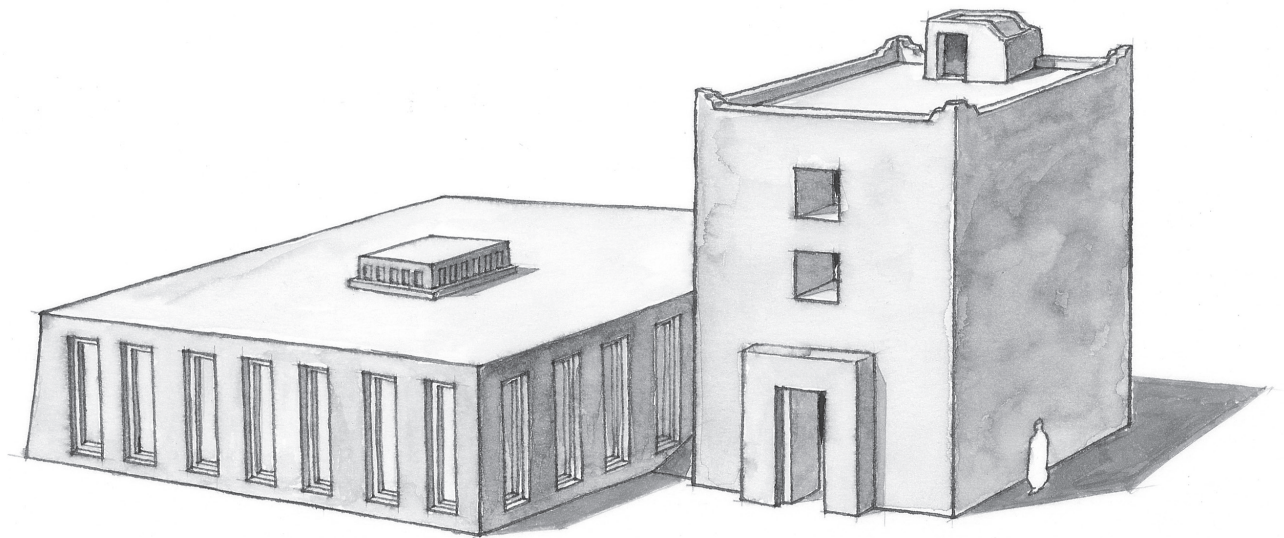


Figure 51: Topographical location (standing slabs) at the junction of the Sacred Way and the Street of the Model.





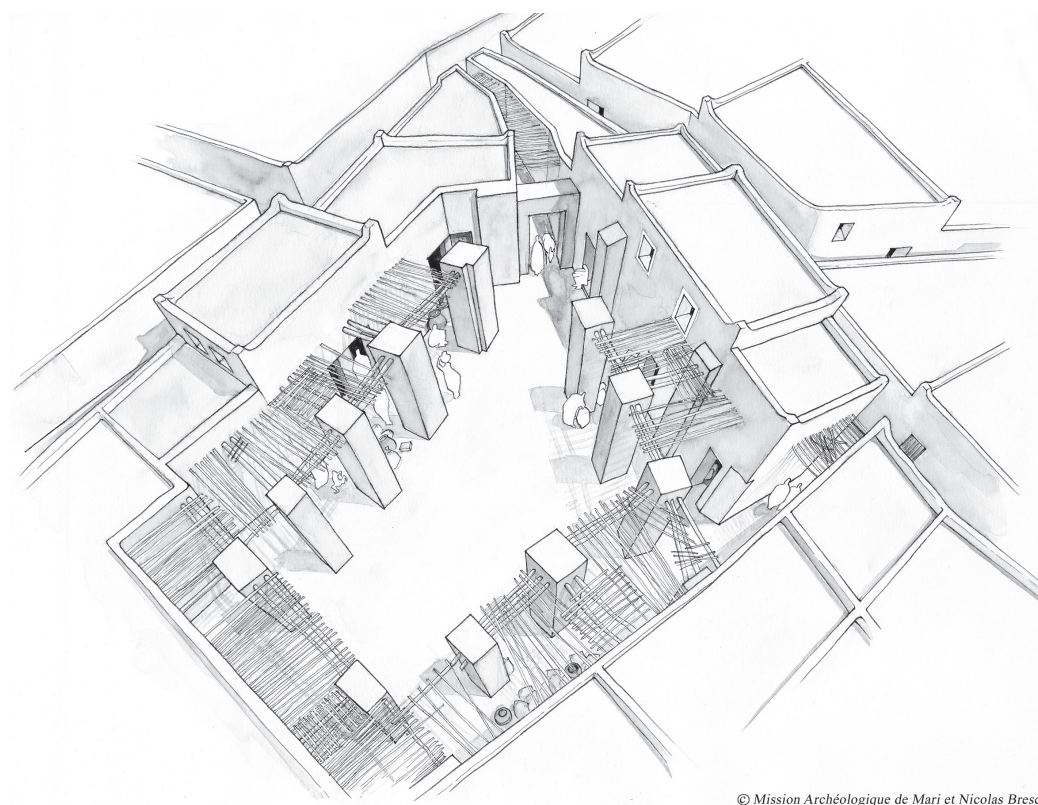
*Figure 52: The Massif Rouge and its temple-tower at the end of City II.*



*Figure 53: Reconstruction of the Massif Rouge and its temple-tower at the end of City II.*



Figure 54: Central part of the Red House.



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Figure 55: Bird's-eye view of the Souk of Mari, City II.



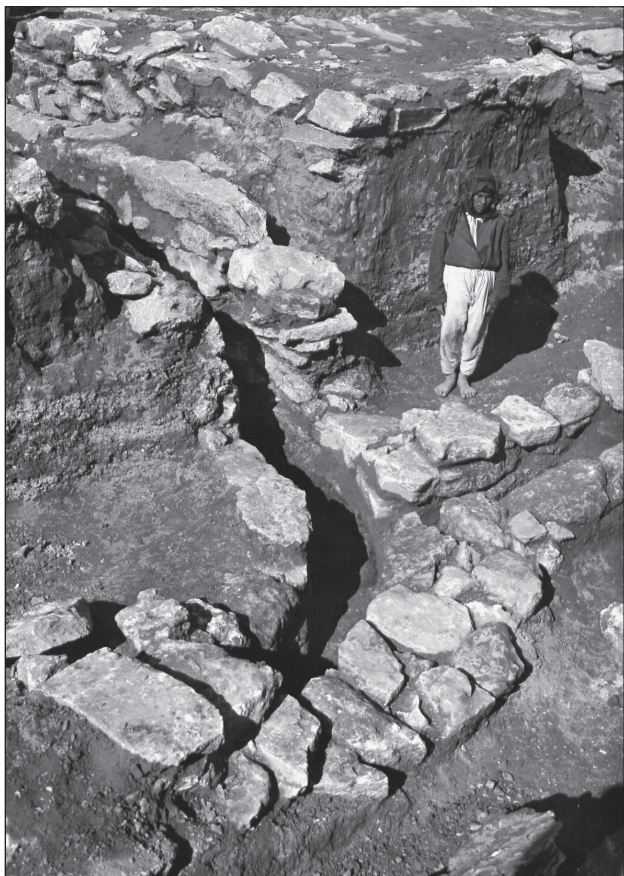


Figure 56: Stone channels of City II under the street bordering the temple of Ishtar.

the western section is occupied by ruins that create a more obvious relief, in the form of two rather flat elevated areas at the end and in the centre, and in the form of a butte in the landscape to the south. Traces discovered after rain revealed either houses or types of *khan* or barrack buildings that probably belong to the beginning of City III; a survey carried out in 2000 shows that the western butte contains the remains of houses belonging to City II. The city had thus in this period overflowed the limits defined by the interior rampart. It is possible that these houses were associated with an artisanal sector, to judge by the large piles of slag found during the survey.

However, the characteristics of the southern part suggest that the ring area could have served, as it did during City I, as a garden zone, at the beginning in its totality, then only partially; the texts of the time of Zimri-Lin clearly mention this garden zone, intended to feed the city, with the water supply probably provided by *shadoofs* from the linking canal of the city.

### ***The communal urban works***

Contrary to certain opinions, the ancient Near Eastern city was not simply a disordered agglomeration of people living in the same space around the hubs of palace and temples, the latter having monopolised the attention of researchers. Because of the exceptional richness of the evidence found, Mari provides a fine example of communal building works.

The street network, first of all, is not a simple linking of inhabited spaces with themselves and the exterior, often

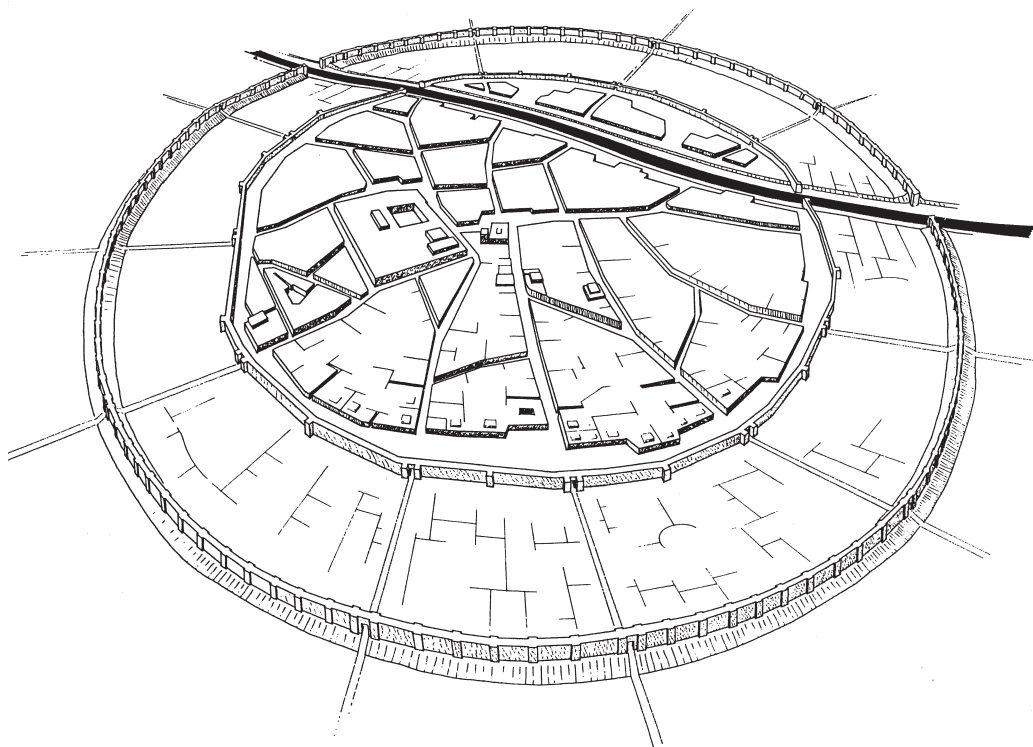


Figure 57: General outline of the reconstruction of City II.



considered to be the only role of streets. The system created at Mari shows that, for the common good, the street network also served to rapidly evacuate rainwater, either by radial streets which were dug lower than the level of the houses and ran directly to the periphery, or by transverse streets that absorbed the water through their pavement, enabling it to slowly filter down to the water table or towards the periphery without affecting the mud brick base of the architecture.

Even more impressive, Mari possessed a system for capturing rainwater. City II made great use of buried channels; some of these, over short distances, sometimes served to evacuate sewage, but in most cases, and this is a particularly interesting discovery, they served to capture rainwater. The storage reservoirs have not yet been found, because they have not been looked for, but it is certain that any channel that does not end after a few metres in a catch pit cannot serve to evacuate sewage, because a sewer network only functions if fed regularly by running water. In other Near Eastern cities of this period there is nothing that resembles channelling for water conveyance.

The largest network of channels observed, which is closely associated with the temple of Ishtar (fig. 56), is the one that demonstrates this significant aspect of communal life. Other channels have been discovered, for example the double channelling in a street in excavation zone F.

The importance of these observations goes beyond the simple question of the storage of rainwater, which was considered pure and much appreciated. Beyond the terms employed – it is preferable not to call these conduits sewers – is the question of the management and the maintenance of the network of channels and probably of the final receptacle, which has not been found. The fact that the network at the temple of Ishtar ensures recovery from several buildings that were apparently independent of one another – a sanctuary, a market, and buildings that have disappeared to the north and south of the temple – introduces the question of the responsibility of management, as this operation would clearly have depended upon the community. Were there administrative bodies in charge or was this the responsibility of the king? Did the temple, which was at the heart of the system, play a role?

The sanitation concerns of the inhabitants of City II were particularly strong. For example, they installed in several places small and large catch pits to eliminate sewage; a frequent technique was to channel the waste from the lavatory on the ground floor by a conduit that passed through the wall into a small catch pit set into the absorbent nearby street. The artisanal installations were equipped when necessary with a platform having an evacuation slit above a catch pit.

Of course, these installations do not appear in general to have had any major importance, even for the House of Artisanal Installations. They depended exclusively upon the inhabitant of the house and required no intervention by the public power, unlike the rainwater. As far as is known, the squat toilets of this residence are the first clearly

attested examples of such installations. They appear to be unknown in previous periods, in Mari as well as elsewhere. It is likely that previously a hole under the stairs partly covered with small logs was considered adequate. This is then an indication of an important transformation in hygiene practices in an urban milieu, an essential stage in the development of communal life.

It is thus very clear that the city, even apart from the palace and temple, was not a disordered jumble of houses along tortuous and insalubrious alleys. A communal life with rules existed, even though we have hardly any information on how the city was administrated. However, we do know from the Ebla texts that there may have been Elders who received part of the tribute intended for the city of Mari. They would certainly have formed a political structure which may have been in charge of certain aspects of urban management, but their relations with the palace are unknown.

This was not an urban development without principles or ideas, as has been often presented, in which only the political and religious hubs had any real importance (fig. 57).

### **The urbanism of City III under the *Shakkanakku* (fig. 58)**

The destruction by Naram-Sin resulted in an accumulation of ruins. The punishment inflicted by the Akkadian king for Mari's participation in the general revolt was particularly harsh. However, his objective does not seem to have been the destruction of the capital on the Euphrates, as he appointed a governor and established two of his daughters as priestesses. What is known of the reconstruction of the city?

#### ***A grand policy of urban planning?***

All the monuments of City II that have been explored had tragic ends, and none apart from the palace were immediately reconstructed. It appears that a part of the city remained in a ruined state for some time and that certain arteries – the Sacred Way – suffered heavy erosion after violent rains; excavation area L has provided evidence for this kind of destruction.

In this chaotic situation in which the city appears to have been abandoned, the palace seems to have been a protected island, as it was immediately put into working order, even as far as restoration relating to the throne room, Space 4 and the Sacred Precinct. Although the precinct of the temples was not considered a priority, restoration work was nevertheless carried out fairly rapidly (sector of the Anonymous Temples), but the great sanctuaries (temple of Lions and temple of Ninhursag) do not appear until a century after the beginning of the *Shakkanakku* dynasty.

Apparently a grand enterprise of reconstruction was not chosen. The political power was first reaffirmed, and the

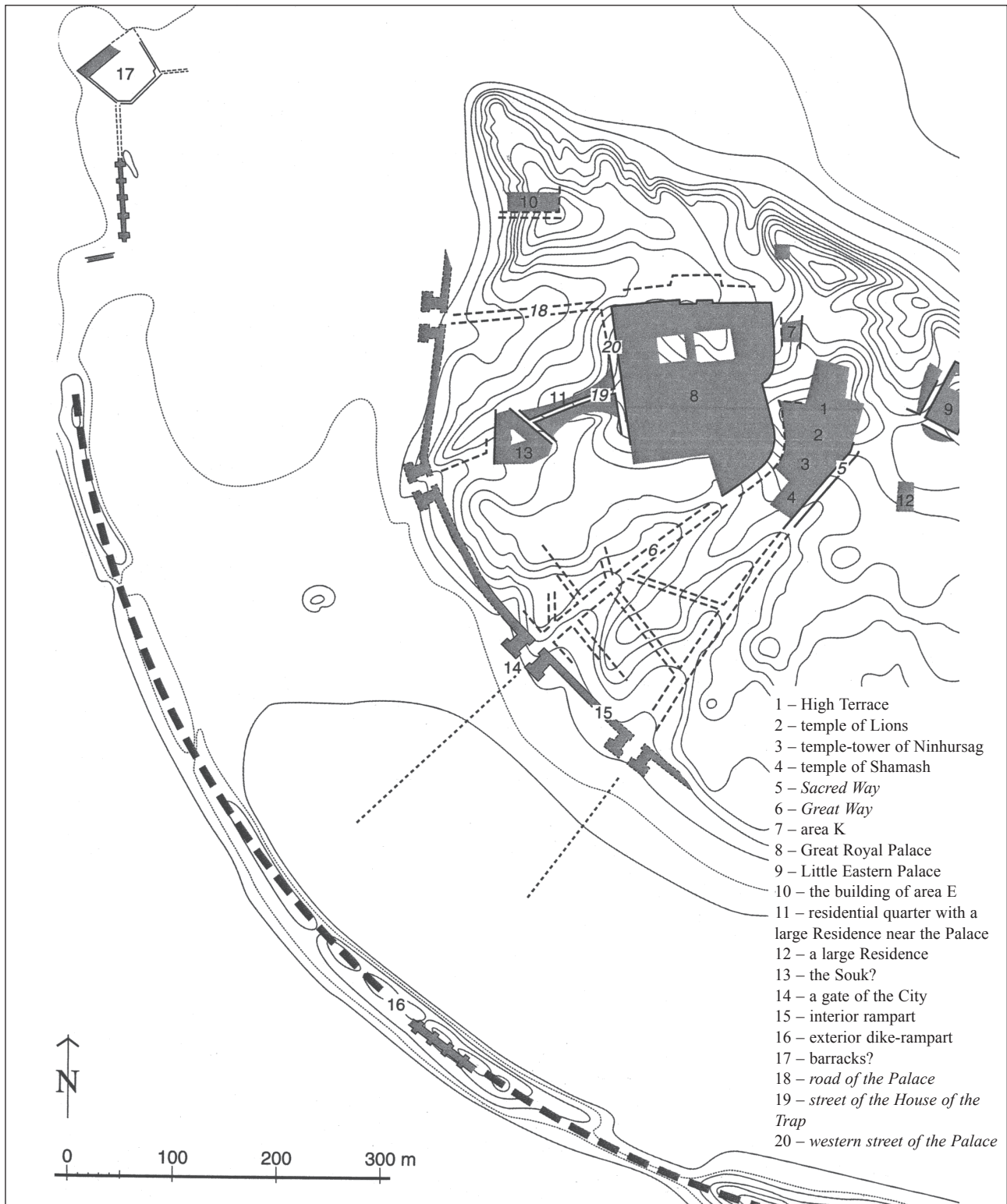


Figure 58: The different monuments and the urban organisation of City III.

palace put into working order. The goal was not to give back to vanquished Mari its previous role nor to place it again under the protection of the gods, but rather by maintaining the city in a state of subjugation, guarantee domination by Akkad of the road between the Khabur and Babylonia.

It is the building of the “phantom palace” that could mark the moment of re-found independence with regard to Babylonia, and of Mari’s repossession of its own destiny. This operation probably absorbed all available energy for some time.

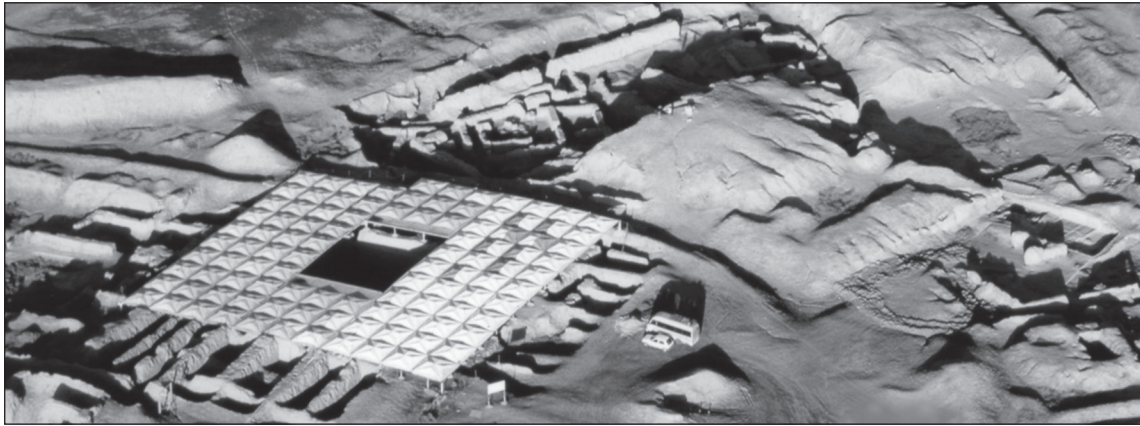


Figure 59: The heart of the city with the Sacred Precinct (City II), the High Terrace of City III bordered by the temple of Lions and the Massif Rouge.

Then, in the reign of Nûr-Mêr (and perhaps before), important building works began with the erection of the temple of Ninhursag; in the following half-century, the temple of Lions, which was probably associated with the High Terrace, and finally the *Sahuru* were built. Although the temple of Ninhursag and the *Sahuru* appear to be relatively modest enterprises, this is not true for the group formed by the High Terrace and the temple of Lions (fig. 59) where the volume of the masonry, the masses of fill, the quantities of pebbles and wood necessary for building are evidence for a solidly established power and certain resources. The construction of the new Great Royal Palace that followed provides clear evidence of the existence of an ambitious policy of reconstruction.

### ***The ground plan (fig. 58)***

The city probably never had a true break in its development; there is no trace of a general destruction followed by a general reconstruction in the history of City III. Thus a division into two phases, “early” and “late”, seen in excavation area F but not in excavation area K, would have only a very local value, as in a particular sector the passage from “uncontrolled” urban development to organised urban planning would have occurred at the time of reconstruction of that sector.

Therefore, as the reconstruction of the city was spread over two centuries, it is the image of the city in the twentieth century BC, as it appeared at the end of the great building program, that it is possible to present.

Paradoxically, at least in appearance, because of the erosion of the surface of the tell since the abandonment of the site, we know much less about the organisation of this urban period, City III, than the previous one. It is difficult to establish a ground plan because, aside from the great monuments of the central part, there is not enough direct information.

### **The monuments in the centre of the city**

The High Terrace is situated in a dominant position, being a large platform of about 42 m by 25 m. Its southern side adjoined the temple of Lions, while its northern side was occupied by the access ramp which doubled the surface area of the building (figs. 59, 60, 61).

At the present time this group forms the centre of the sector of the temples and is the highest point of the city; it is not certain that this was so in ancient times, as the palace on the west and the temple-tower of Ninhursag, as well as the temple of Lions, could have been higher.

This High Terrace continued the tradition of the Massif Rouge that preceded it in City II. But the builders of City III decided to change its location to another place. The new sector is located to the west and a little to the south of the Massif Rouge and was set upon land apparently occupied by temples or temple annexes of City II.

In all of this zone, the builders proceeded to fill in and to level, spreading a layer of pebbles which marks the starting point of the new constructions (figs. 62, 63).

What became of the Massif Rouge? It appears that weathering, perhaps along with voluntary levelling, brought about a flattening of this hill, which was then covered by other monuments which have completely disappeared, probably a temple or associated installations, given its religious past.

It is not easy to see what led the *Shakkanakku* sovereigns to maintain the tradition of the religious High Terrace, while changing its location and modifying its appearance. It was clearly not a simple change in fashion as the fundamental function subsisted, and other changes affected the religious sector.

Leaning against the north face of the High Terrace, the temple of Lions appears to have been another novelty; even though it adheres to the architectural tradition of northern Syria, there is no other example, except perhaps at Tell Leilan, where it directly adjoins a High Terrace, apparently without any inherent link.



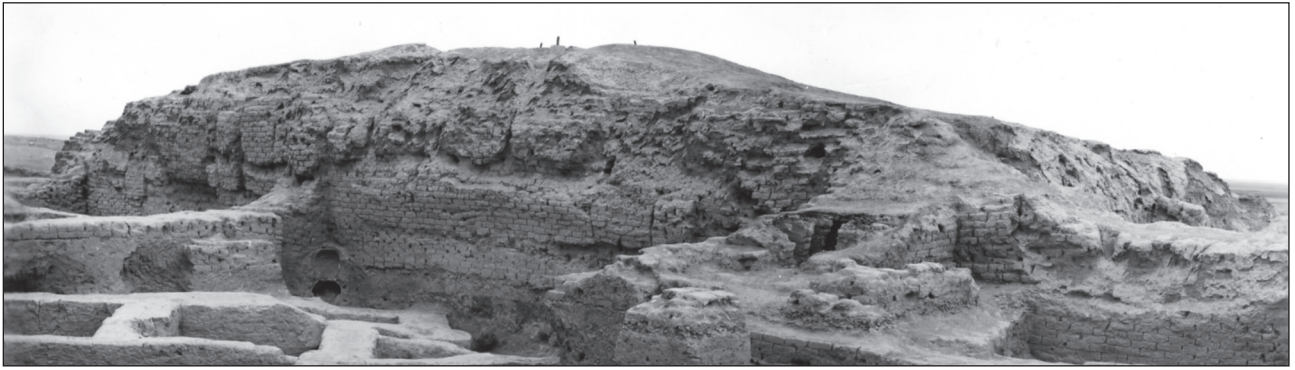


Figure 60: North façade of the High Terrace.



Figure 61: South façade of the High Terrace with the excavations in the sacred sector.

Immediately south of the esplanade and the temple of Lions extended the area of the temple-tower of Ninhursag, the form of which appears to be very innovative in comparison to the preceding temple, but which follows the tradition of the temple-tower of the Massif Rouge with, however, slightly different characteristics.

Finally, even more to the south, the temple of Shamash rose on its original spot, the plans of which are quite ill-defined for this period, because of the reconstruction that occurred under the king Yahdun-Lim.

All this group forms a coherent whole, bordered and served on its south-eastern side by the Sacred Way, which comes directly from one of the gates of the city. What happened on the western side is less well known, because an extension enlarged the palace and probably cut into a constructed area that is now impossible to define, or to know whether it was related to the sector of the temples, which seems unlikely. What occurred north of the access to the High Terrace is mostly unknown. For the moment, only excavation area K indicates an absence of the *Shakkanakku* level, but it is limited in size.

West of the religious sector extends the palace sector, which has two great architectural phases in this period: during the first two centuries of the *Shakkanakku* dynasty,

the Phantom Palace, identified in the same place by a few traces but of which neither the organisation nor the edges are known; then, the Great Royal Palace in the form which it kept until the end of the history of the city. During its construction, it is possible that its surface area was smaller; in particular the quarter of the storehouses, which extended along its southern side, could have had a somewhat later extension, like the area of the entrance for chariots on the eastern side, which provided access to the sector of the southern storehouses.

### Monuments in the city

Two buildings were discovered and excavated that are located in the urban context, but isolated and not integrated into the urban design; they show that the heart of the city did not contain all of the important buildings and that the urban fabric was diversified.

First is the Little Eastern Palace located north-west of the temple quarter. It is bordered by streets on its west, south and east sides. Its opening faces towards the north/north-west roughly in the direction of the river, like the Great Royal Palace, but not exactly from the same angle.

The second monument occupies the north-west





*Figure 62: Layer of pebbles in the northern part of the High Terrace.*



*Figure 63: Layer of pebbles on the stripped level of the palace of City II in the sector of the gate.*





Figure 64: Palaeomagnetic reading of the quarter of the south-west gate of the city.

promontory – the building in excavation zone E – and is only partially understood. It is also bordered by streets in the part discovered, but its size and organisation are unknown.

### The quarters of the city

The layer containing the surface of the area occupied by the Souk (excavated by André Parrot before the war) presented foundations which may be attributed to the *Shakkanakku* period like those discovered in the western part of excavation area F. The organisation of this quarter

may be guessed, but a reconstruction cannot be taken far.

However, interesting information comes from tombs of this period that were brought to light. Their morphology and objects, highly characteristic, indicate that they were tombs created beneath the floors of houses; thus, even in the absence of walls, their presence indicates that they are located in a residential quarter. This was observed in excavation area F and in a section of excavation area B. These tombs in themselves enable identification of domestic quarters in certain sections of the city. Another piece of evidence for the existence of quarters of the city that have disappeared because of the erosion of the surface



of the tell since the conquest of Hammurabi is the presence of many catch pits with their tops truncated, which may be found everywhere on the tell. They provide evidence that the entire urban surface was occupied at the end of City III.

### ***The organisation of the street network***

The discovery of the gate at the outlet of the wadi of the Great Way confirmed the topographic analysis made long ago which established that the large wadis on the tell provide the outline of the ancient streets of the city.

The exploration campaign using palaeo-magnetism in April 2001 also confirmed the outline of the Great Way. In addition it enabled recognition of some of the streets that linked the radiating avenues, before any excavation took place (fig. 64).

It is thus possible not only to envision a gate placed at each end of the large wadis on the tell, but to delineate in the plans some of the main streets of the ancient city. The entire structure of the street network thus emerges, although the spaces in between cannot always be understood.

A second series of observations provides more information. It became apparent that, aside from rare exceptions such as the re-location of the High Terrace, the outline of the street network was not subjected to any radical modifications between City II and City III. The transverse streets that ensured linkage with the great radial avenues remained in place, as did the avenues themselves as well as the absorbent road surfaces set in place at the time of City II. As City II is better known than City III, it is possible, without breaking the rules of reconstruction, to partially complement what is known of City III by information from City II. The foundations of City III in the quarter of the Souk and in excavation zone F demonstrate the permanence of the organisation of the street network between City II and City III.

All this does not provide the whole plan of the city, but the principal outlines may be seen: the great radial streets converge for the most part at the political and religious centre which occupies an east-west band at the top of the tell; this zone dominates both the port centred on the canal, a zone towards which the important civil buildings face, and the part of the city that receives the great exterior roads. The temple quarter, which appears to be central even though this is an illusion, possesses a favoured access towards the south-west. It is perhaps not accidental if two great radial avenues are close to each other and practically parallel for part of their length, the Sacred Way and the Great Way. These two great arteries had two different functions, but the palace contained the remains of the most prestigious temple of City II, and these two avenues possibly had quite similar functions during this period.

### ***Conclusion***

To judge by what is now known, the *Shakkanakku* dynasty clearly intended to devote much care to the city but

proceeded by stages, apparently according to its means, so that order could be maintained over the choices made. But given the spreading out of the building work over time, the development of a policy of urban planning may have existed. It does not seem, in spite of the scope of the work devoted to the religious buildings, that the gods had priority; the political power, to judge by the order of the constructions and the reconstructions, clearly favoured the religious, but it is possible that for a time there existed temporary sanctuaries which then disappeared when the great temples were built.

Although the organisation of the city with its great arteries, political and religious hubs and its double wall can be clearly perceived, the internal structure of the residential quarters, of which only excavation area F has provided some evidence, is much less understood. It is possible that a protected part of the city will be discovered that will produce complete houses, but it must be remembered that most of the *Shakkanakku* level was removed by the erosion that followed the destruction of the city by Hammurabi and that only elevated points may contain remains of this level.

### **The modifications of the Amorite period (fig. 65)**

Reconstructed by the *Shakkanakku* and not subjected to any important destructive event afterward, City III continued its existence during the Amorite dynasty without any particular change in the general urban fabric. It is however probable that two large residences, one to the west of the palace, the other to the east of the temples, were constructed in the final century of the existence of the city. The house in excavation area K, situated east of the palace, where a scribe appears to have taught his skill, may be added to the evidence. The architectural group to which it belongs was certainly created in the *Shakkanakku* period, but the house itself dates to the period of the Amorite dynasty.

Of course certain modifications occurred during the use of this or that building, and certain parts, particularly of the palaces, were subject to rebuilding. But the street network apparently remained the same, not surprising as the structure of the city did not change. Some sections of supplementary streets were found, but these do not modify the general picture.

The evidence is enriched to a certain extent by the texts, although there is not much to be gleaned concerning topography or administration.

Any mention of the presence of "Elders", often considered to be a traditional institution, never appears; but the king would have listened to their advice, even if it was he who made the final decision. Did the city have any administrative autonomy? Was it completely subject to the king? If this was so, was it a situation specific to the Amorite period? Or was it inherited from the *Shakkanakku*, a distant consequence of the subjugation of the city after Naram-Sin's conquest and the installation of Ididish?

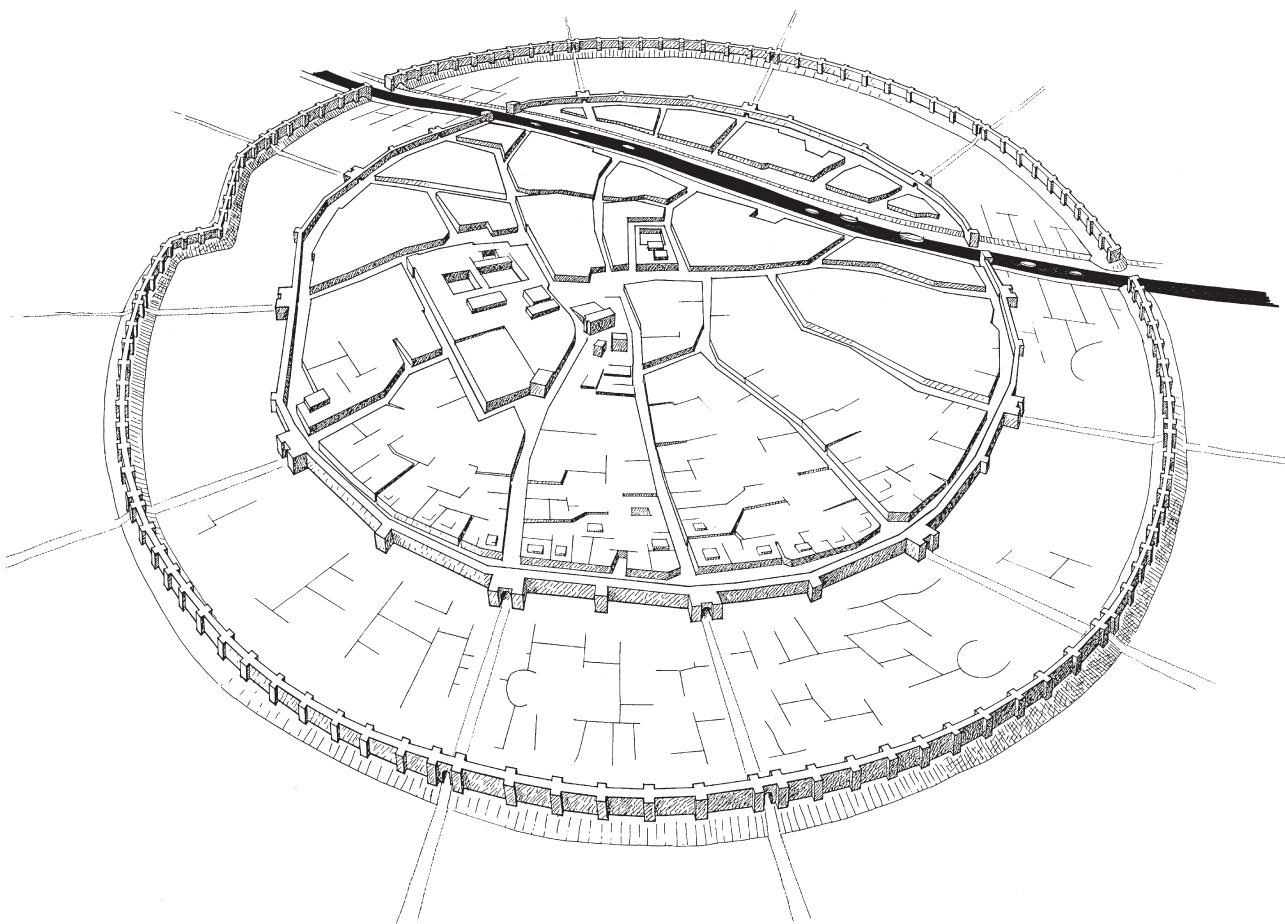


Figure 65: General outline of the reconstruction of City III.

In the Amorite period, the “palace prefect” was in fact the governor of the city, in other words the person responsible for the different services of the palace, under the control of the king of course, and in charge of the administration of the city and the district. This is illustrated by the formulaic phrase of Bahdi-Lim in his letters to the king: “the city of Mari, the palace and the district are well”.

The city was divided into quarters, called *babtum*; in the texts are lists of inhabitants grouped by *babtum*, each under the authority of a leader. It may be that the term *babtum* is related to the word for a gate (*bab*) of the city, thus designating the sectors according to their relation to the avenues that led to the different gates.

From contacts that the prefect of the palace had with the population of the city concerning a particular incident in which a child was found dead, it emerges that the leaders of the quarter were consulted, as well as the artisans, who, although independent, sometimes worked for the palace. It appears that craftsmen were often wealthy, and were also grouped in quarters, perhaps according to the craft practised. The shopkeepers and traders living in the

quarter of the port, the *karum*, had a special status, under the responsibility of a kind of “provost of merchants”. There is a category that strangely does not appear in the textual evidence, the *mushkenum*, a population that did not depend on the palace. Why is this category absent? Did they live outside the walls?

### General conclusion

Several major features characterise the urban system that existed during the 12 centuries of the history of Mari, often considered to be the richest of the Mesopotamian cities in terms of the information provided concerning city planning. This preconceived urbanism, rigorously carried out, demonstrates an exceptional sensitivity to the hydrological and climatic constraints sustained by mud brick architecture, and a realistic vision of the possibilities for human communal life. The initial rules that were followed are clear, and it is also remarkable that an exacting respect for these rules was consistently honoured.

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## V. The development of domestic architecture

### **The houses of City I (fig. 66)**

The domestic architecture of City I is quite diversified; three categories can be defined, although at the present time only one appears to be truly present throughout the site.

#### ***The common model (fig. 66 [ff])***

The dominant feature in this type of house, exemplified by the House of the Donkey and the Wheel (fig. 67), is a rectangular room with standardised dimensions (about 3.5 m × 6 to 8 m) within an enclosed space that is open to the sky, has a door onto the street and is surrounded by a series of small outbuildings. Evidence for three examples was provided in excavation area L, and this type of house appears to have persisted during most of the period of City I. Two other examples, although incomplete, were identified in the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct and in P-space 4 of the same palace. The principal room clearly served as family quarters – the presence of a first floor is not certain, but not impossible – while the outbuildings served as storerooms, places for *tannour* (ovens) and workshops, as seen in the houses of excavation area L, including the House of the Donkeys and the Wheel, in which were found two impressions of wheels and wheel-making tools.

#### ***The mud brick houses (fig. 66 [a–d])***

In an incomplete group of level 2 under the temple of Ishtar, a single house, although incomplete, presents elements of organisation thanks to its fairly large surface: the rooms are laid out regularly and their floors covered with plaster, but there is no clear design except for a small central space. However, the presence of an artisanal workshop with a place for evacuation of liquid waste,

consisting of a platform with a slit, is exceptional and may be the oldest example of such an installation. An upper storey is possible, as the walls are 0.60 to 0.80 m thick. This house is particularly interesting because it appears to be an adaptation to an urban environment.

#### ***The Building with Stone Foundations (fig. 66 [e])***

The exceptional nature of the technique used, identical to that of the interior rampart, could simply be the builders' solution to protect the base of the building from the negative effects of the water table.

This construction technique was perfectly mastered (enclosing wall 2.20 to 2.40 thick, interior walls 1.70 to 2 m thick, size of the rooms between 4.50 m by 5.50 m or 13 m by 5.50 m, perfect alignments of the façades of the walls), which makes it particularly regrettable that only a part of the building is known (30 m by 27 m, a surface area of about 800 m<sup>2</sup>). The function and the organisation of this building remain unknown, but it may have had an upper storey.

Was this an administrative building, a palace, a temple? Its function remains uncertain, but the most reasonable possibility is that of an administrative building related to a palace.

It is in any case an example of the high degree of technical knowledge of the first inhabitants of the site, who cannot be considered to have been nomads in the process of sedentarisation.

### ***Conclusion on the architecture of City I***

It is in the houses of the domestic quarters of City I (excavation area L), as well as in the specialised workshops (excavation area Pcs) that artisanal activity was discovered: metallurgy, pottery, wheel-making, dyeing.



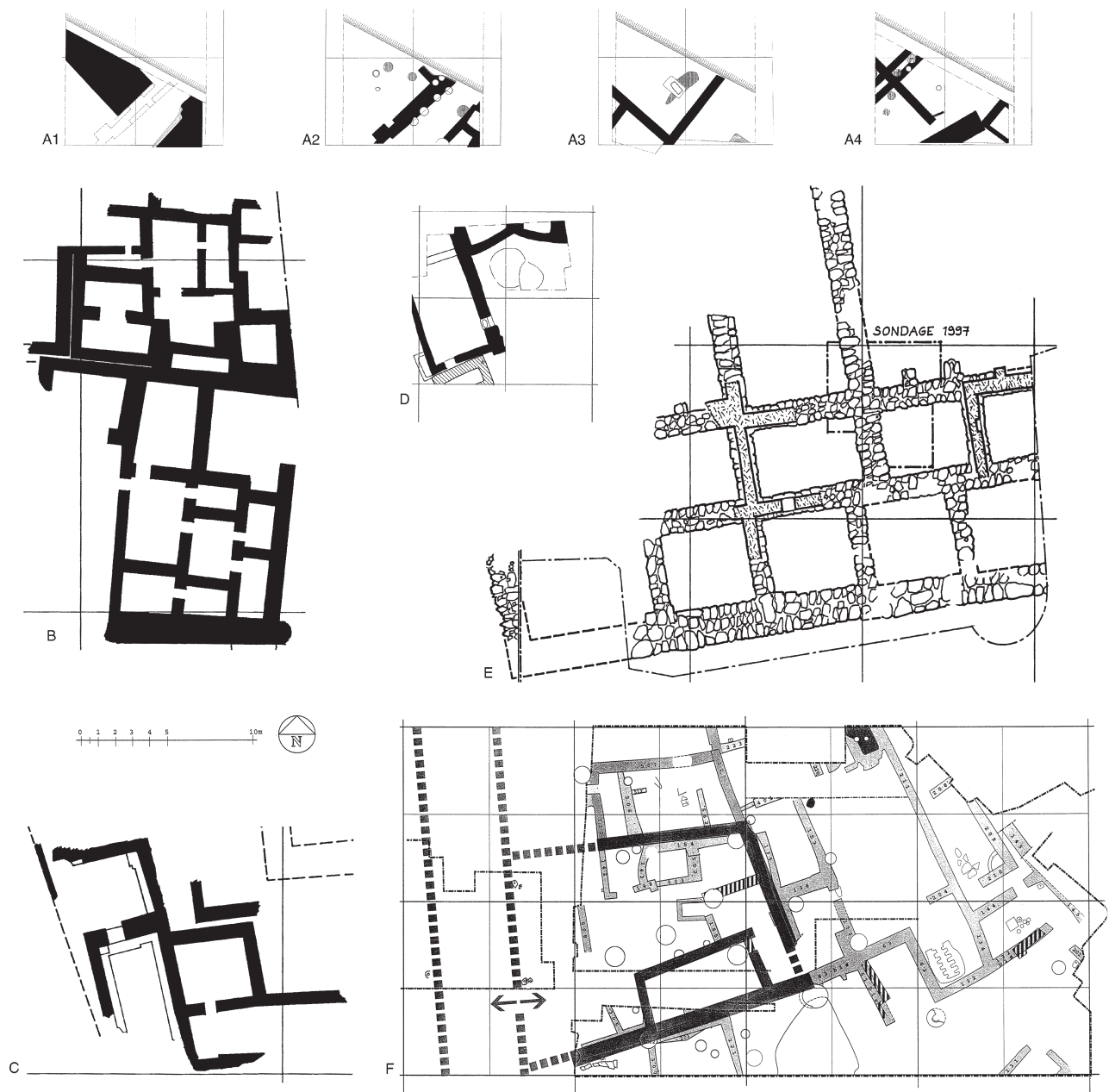


Figure 66: The domestic architecture of City I.

Although there is still much to be learned about the architecture of City I, it is evident that the builders were skilled in reliable techniques, knew how to adapt to a difficult environment and possessed clear concepts of the organisation of space. Because the evidence is still insufficient, in particular for the monumental architecture, it is not possible to know whether the builders were the direct heirs of the architects of the Uruk period. Nevertheless, it does appear that new concepts are at work here that indicate a clear break with the past.

### Urban domestic architecture in City II (fig. 68)

With six identifiable buildings, the evidence for the domestic architecture of City II is not only relatively abundant, but also strikingly diverse.

#### *A small house (fig. 68 [c])*

An example of a modest dwelling, this small group, located in the street of the House of the Trap and in the continuation of the house in the quarter of the Souk, is 8 m long and between 7 m and 3.5 m wide in the north-east (entire surface

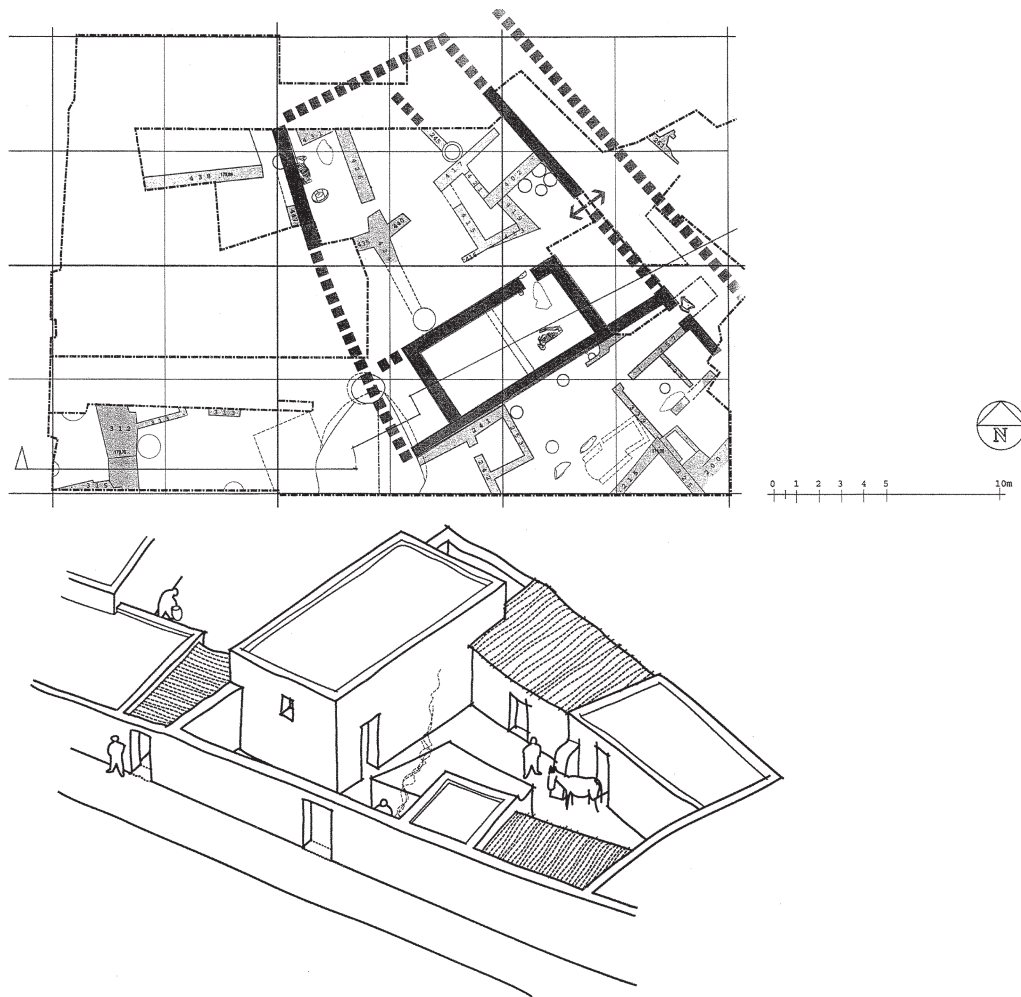


Figure 67: *The House of the Donkey and the Wheel (City I), plan and reconstruction.*

area about 39 m<sup>2</sup>); it consists of three spaces and may have had a storey above as its walls are very thick. This small dwelling appears to indicate a certain imbrication of differentiated houses within the same quarter.

#### ***The House of the Souk quarter (fig. 68 [b])***

The plan, close in shape to a trapezoid, was clearly determined by the location of this house at the angle of two streets (street of the Souk and street of the House of the Trap) which as usual at Mari are not perpendicular. The entire surface area is approximately 155 m<sup>2</sup> and the usable surface 91 m<sup>2</sup>. The thickness of the walls is uneven, between 0.80 and 1.20 m.

According to the vestiges found, the height was probably about 1.80 m if not more, indicating the possible existence of a first storey.

Access was by a single door opening onto the street of the Souk, near the point where it meets the House of the Trap; between the door and the central space extends a quite spacious vestibule equipped with a bathroom

with evacuation towards an exterior catch pit located in the street. The organisation of the house is based upon a central space measuring 5 m per side from which there is access to the 9 rooms around it, as well as a tenth on the north-east side.

Two structural reinforcements, an imposing pilaster along the north-east perimeter and the thickening of the north-east wall of room 9, illustrate the care the builders took to ensure the base for a higher level; so the existence of an upper storey is certain.

It is also certain that the central space was covered; there is no system of drainage to evacuate rainwater which would have stagnated in the “courtyard” and caused destruction to the house.

#### ***The House of the Trap in excavation area F (fig. 68 [a])***

Not well understood as it was discovered in an exploratory trench and not an extensive excavation, this house nevertheless provides complementary evidence for the

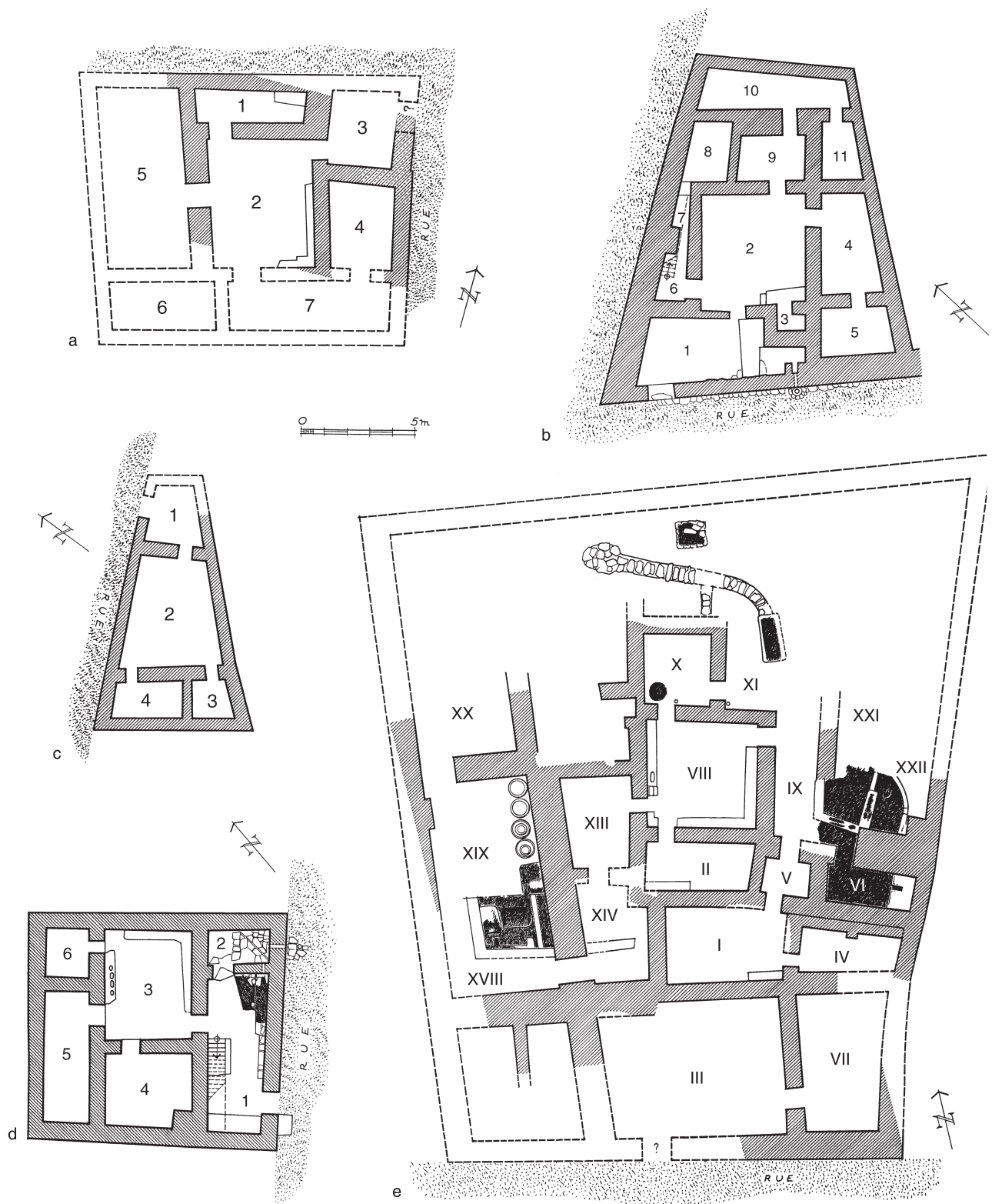


Figure 68: The domestic architecture of City II: [a] House of the Mongoose Trap (excavation area F); [b] and [c] two houses north of the Souk; [d] The Red House; [e] The House of Artisans' Installations of excavation area B.



conclusions that have been drawn concerning more complete houses.

Edged on the north by the street that carries its name and on the east by the street of the Two Pipes, its entranceway was probably located at the junction of the two streets. The general organisation follows the usual principle, that is, a distribution of rooms based on a central space, in this case 4.50 m × 6 m, with a bench on the east and south sides. But only two other rooms are actually defined and understood, the first being probably the kitchen, perhaps closely associated with the bathroom. The evidence for an upper storey lies in the thickness of the walls, 75 cm to 1 m, which corresponds to that of houses possessing storeys, and in the depth of the foundations, more than a metre, discovered on the street side. It is not certain whether the space occupied by the bread ovens or *tannour* was a courtyard or a room, but it appears that in this period they were placed with no inconvenience inside the houses.

### ***The House of Artisanal Installations in excavation area B (fig. 68 [e])***

Even with 500 m<sup>2</sup> of surface excavated, this house is still not completely understood; its eastern and western edges have still not been discovered with certainty, the southern wall along the east-west street is uncovered only over a length of 7 m and all the northern part has disappeared with the erosion of the northern edge of the tell. The location of the door is not known; it was perhaps in a room such as III that edged the street, but there are also other possibilities.

The archaeological exploration has brought to light the final phase of the building, in which may be seen a series of rearrangements, partial modifications and reconstructions. Thus it is almost impossible to recognise the original plan; because the evidence is somewhat different from that of the street of the Souk or the Red House, it is more difficult to define the functions as can be done with a type-plan that corresponds to life styles of a particular point in time. The interesting converse of this is that the transformations are related to specific activities which do not enter into the concept of a type-plan of a dwelling; the intensive use of bitumen points in the same direction.

The plan, partly reconstructed from evidence found in excavation and from comparison, appears to be satisfactory although incomplete; it is clearly not certain in all details.

### **Organisation**

Space VIII, which could be called central, with the surrounding rooms encircling it in two tiers, is square in shape (5 m each side); with one door in each façade, always situated near a corner, it appears to be a kind of pivot in direct relation with all the rooms of the first encircling tier, the rooms of the second tier surrounding those of the first.

The walls, usually between 0.75 and 0.80 m thick (except for partition walls, no more than 50 cm thick), are sometimes double this width because of two adjoining

walls; this could be the result of a structural transformation and the incorporation of rooms of contiguous houses into this unit.

The question of an upper storey remains open; no trace of a stairway has been found. But the thickness of the walls and their preserved height (often 1.50 m) indicate that an upper storey probably existed, given that the assemblage of evidence points to this feature normally being part of the urban architecture.

### **The small “altar” and the little tank in the central space VIII**

At the southern extremity of the bench set against the western wall, a small construction completely covered with plaster applied twice, with a little boat-shaped receptacle (called a “barcasse” by André Parrot) situated some 20 cm to the north, resembles examples of what is understood to be a small altar. This type of construction played a role in private religious practices as well as public ones, and so does not necessarily define the space as a temple.

### **A dyeing workshop? (fig. 69)**

Three rooms (VI, XXI, XXII) where bitumen was used intensively certainly constituted a workshop.

Room VI (trapezoidal, about 1.50 m by 4 m), linked by a small passage to corridor IX, has a floor with a regular slope of thirty centimetres from the door to an evacuation hole; this is located at the base of a vertical slit in the middle of the bench built against the entire length of the eastern wall. The evacuation hole leads to a catch pit located immediately beneath. This installation would appear to enter into the category of “toilets with seats”, whose function is still undetermined but found four other times at Mari, in the northern palace at Tell Asmar, at Tell Beydar, and at Tello.

Group XXI–XXII is separated from vestibule VI by a low wall, formed by gypsum slabs covered with bitumen, rising no higher than a metre, ensuring a direct relation, although raised, with IX–VI and XXI. Behind this separation wall is an installation made with closely laid-out gypsum blocks covered with a thick layer of bitumen in which are situated two clearly separated basins (XXI: about 3 m by 2 m and XXIII: about 2.50 m by 1.50 m) that are surrounded by a bench. The second basin, in the shape of a quarter-circle, was equipped with a spherical jar imbedded in the floor up to the top of the neck. All the northern part of this installation has disappeared due to the erosion of the tell.

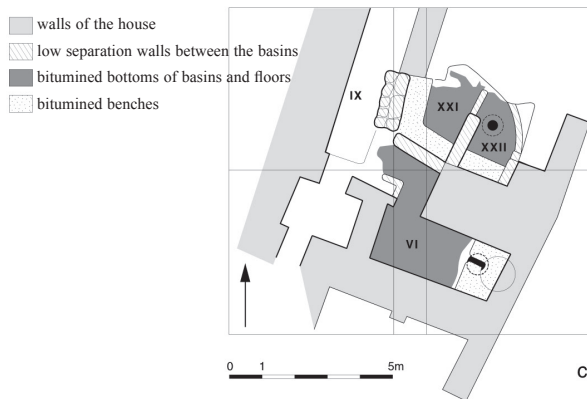
The close association of room VI and group XXI–XXII points toward the possibility that the evacuation hole with catch pit beneath has nothing to do with toilets of seat type (as generally presumed) but rather that these rooms were related to an artisanal activity necessitating much water, perhaps dyeing, given the two basins and the jar embedded in one of them.



a



b



c

### The workshop of the dyer (?)

- a – the vestibule of access to hall VI with its separation wall VI–XXI in stone and bitumen.
- b – hall VI with, against the east wall, the bench with an evacuation on the floor. A later pit has partly destroyed the east wall and the upper surface of the bench at the place of the middle cleft.
- c – plan of the installation
- d – the western basin XXI with the separation wall towards IX (above left) and towards VI (outside photo left) and the separation wall towards basin XXII (below right). Note the bench around the basin on the east and south.
- e – basin XXII with, in its centre, the aperture of the buried vessel.



d



e

Figure 69: The (possible) dyers' workshop of the House of Artisans' Installations. [a] The access vestibule. [b] The room of the platform with cleft. [c] Plan of the whole installation. [d] The western basin. [e] The second basin.

### A bakery? (fig. 70)

In a square space measuring 3 m by 3 m, defined by a large separation wall on the east and by two low walls to the south and west, a kind of tank placed in the centre

was found, oriented east-west, measuring 1.50 m by 1 m and embedded in the floor more than fifty cm; its western part is surmounted by a square platform. The presence of shelves, or raised places all around the tank, suggests that





Figure 70: Series of “tannours” (bread ovens) in the bakery of the House of Artisans’ Installations.

the object produced had to be set down immediately; in the northern part of the room a series of *tannour* (ovens) was found, thus perhaps this was a place of preparation of bread before baking. Comparison with room XIII in the Little Eastern Palace of the period of the *Shakkanakku* points in this direction. However, if this conclusion is to be viable, it must be observed that such an installation would not have been suitable for a family, but rather for a group in which a team produced bread for everyone.

### The latrines and the sewage network

At the northern end of the house, where its last traces have been lost, a very interesting installation of squat toilets was found; they appear to have belonged, not to this house, but to a stage that preceded it.

### The fire

A large fire put an end to the building of the final phase; the ashes from the superstructures covered the floors of most of the rooms, particularly the central space VIII; thus this was not a courtyard but belongs to the category of covered central spaces current in the third millennium.

All these characteristics indicate that this house was very different from the others.

### The Red House

A complete plan, a preserved height of about 2 m (sometimes 2.20 m), traces of use and adaptation still existing within the walls, and installations on the floor in perfect condition provide rare evidence for the domestic architecture of the period.

### Organisation (fig. 68 [d])

The plan is the classic one of a central space with distribution of the rooms around it; but, probably because the surface area available was not sufficient – 11 m by 12 m –, the eastern part of the encircling tier was not constructed. Thus, curiously the plan was organised based on a central space that was not central, a bending of the geometric rule of the traditional centred plan but maintaining its spirit!

The door of the façade, which could be closed with a bolt, gave access to the first room which had on the east a passage giving access to a bathroom with drainage to the street; the central space (4 m by 5 m) is reached on the north side, and ensures the relation between each of the three remaining rooms, one to the south-west, the last two on the north-west side. In all, 6 rooms occupy a surface of about 125 to 130 m<sup>2</sup>, which does not make a very large house.





*Figure 71: Beginning of the stairway in the Red House.*

### **The installations**

The first room was equipped with:

- a bench running along the south-west wall;
- a complex installation – bench and platform – where water played a role, probably a washing place or kitchen sink with channelling placed at the top of the bench crossing through the wall to join the bathroom;
- the beginning of a stairway (fig. 71).

In the central space, low benches lay along the base of the walls, one of them having oblong cavities quite similar to the small boat-shaped receptacles called “barcasses”.

### **The upper floor**

The exceptional preservation of the walls can be explained only by the existence of an upper storey. Analysis of the different possibilities of circulation and of light led to the conclusion that the entire house had a second level, except the central space which rose to the top of the construction with no other floor; this would have been covered by a roof, and a clerestorey would have ensured the presence of light below and even into the peripheral rooms of the two levels.

### **The last fire**

A violent fire destroyed this house; it left its mark on the

walls and in the layer of burnt debris that covered the floor. Was it an accidental fire or was it part of a city-wide destruction? This is a question that must be reconsidered in the future.

In spite of the fire, very little material was recovered: a small headless statuette of a kid bearer, an “architectural model” with a circular plan, as well as three tablets – accounts concerning barley – whose exact context is unfortunately unknown. But the presence of tablets indicates the quality of the house, as it could have been concerned with administration.

### ***The residential unit of the High Priest (figs. 72, 73)***

In the complex quarter which extends from the Massif Rouge to the palace, located in the middle of a group consisting of a temple, religious buildings and a series of storehouses, is a construction whose architecture is domestic.

### **Structure of the unit**

The whole is trapezoidal in shape – 22 m by 17 m by 12 m – and does not form a closed unit around a central space linked to the exterior by one entrance door, but consists of sub-units (of one to four rooms) set together, independent

from each other and each possessed of an autonomous access opening onto the perimeter of the whole unit.

The heterogeneous character of this building does not conceal the unified structure of the whole, as the trapezoidal plan is treated with exactness and balance. As there is no span of more than 5 m, the intent of the builders to create a tightly meshed structure appears to be evident.

### Lighting the ground floor

Even if there were openings high up the walls to enable illumination of certain rooms from the perimeter of the building, it is clear that most of the light could only have come from the doors; this would have provided poor lighting, possible when the doors were open, but insufficient when they were closed. Why would the builders have created such an impractical system?

### The upper floor

It is the presence of a storey extending over the whole surface area and not, as in ordinary houses, only around the central space, that provides an explanation for the characteristics of this building. The absence of a central space, the centrifugal system of circulation, the existence of a tight and regular layout created to support the floor of an upper storey, the exceptional thickness of the walls, the remaining height of the walls – 2 m – (the original height would have been about 9 m), the existence of a very fine stairway, and objects that would clearly have fallen from the upper storey, all point to this conclusion (fig. 74).

### Organisation of the upper floor (fig. 72 [b])

It is striking that if the intermediate walls are ignored and only the exterior walls are considered, the floor plan is a faithful copy of the plan found in the temples (Sacred Enclosure, temple of Ninni-zaza, for example), in the palace itself and in Mesopotamian buildings such as the palace at Eridu: a nearly square hall with a oblong hall of equal length along one side. The tight structural layout below thus served to create this type of plan on the upper floor and to ensure for example the placement of the stairway and a terrace on the upper floor.

Light could have come from openings in the walls edging the street; however, the principal space could have been equipped with a clerestory system even if a terrace extended to the south.

Thus this building possessed an upper storey, indicated by the structural lines.

### Links to the upper floor (fig. 75)

There are two pieces of evidence that point to the upper storey having direct links to the surrounding buildings. At the southern end of corridor 6 (fig. 72 [a]), there is a double doorway security passage, simplified but clearly

present, that enabled control of circulation along the axis of the ground floor; there is a transverse passage just above (fig. 72 [b, c]) that would have linked two upper storeys facing each other. This upper passage would thus have connected the upper storey of the house, especially the great reception hall, with the building that extends to the east. It is also probable that a passage existed to cross corridor 14 on the upper level, ensuring a connection to the terraces or the upper floor of the group that extended north of corridor 14.

This probable double connection of the house at the upper level is of great importance; it is evidence of a tight integration of this house with its environment. It suggests that this dwelling unit served the High Priest responsible for management of the economic activities related to the religious sector.

## Conclusion: domestic architecture of City II

### The categories

There are three types of buildings uncovered by the excavations: one consists of units that are elementary or little developed, and two are based on coherent structural organisation.

The first type includes the building with three spaces on the street of the House of the Trap; these are houses of very modest people, possibly dependent upon a powerful neighbour.

The second type is the house with a central space, the most common; of the 6 examples found at Mari, 4 are in this category. The principle is simple: in a square or rectangular plan a central space is defined that is nearly square (in general 5 m per side), from which circulation moves towards the rooms or apartments of the periphery; the central space is linked to the only door which opens to the exterior; the remains of a stairway, either in a room or opening into the central space, are often visible.

The third type, represented so far at Mari by only one example, is a type well attested in Mesopotamia. Because it is a dwelling unit, it must be placed in this category, although as an official residence, management centre and perhaps reception hall for a high priest its use is very distinctive. It is quite different from the type with the central space. The structural organisation enables access from a series of rooms on its periphery; penetration is never far into the interior of the building from one of the many entranceways, except in one case. But there is no internal communication between the units composing the basic plan. No central space coordinates circulation or structures hierarchically the different parts of the building; however the presence of a stairway implies the existence of an upper level.

Although the ground surface area is similar in these models it is differentiated by the presence or absence of a central space. When it exists, it would have been the hub of circulation on the ground floor and organised the upper

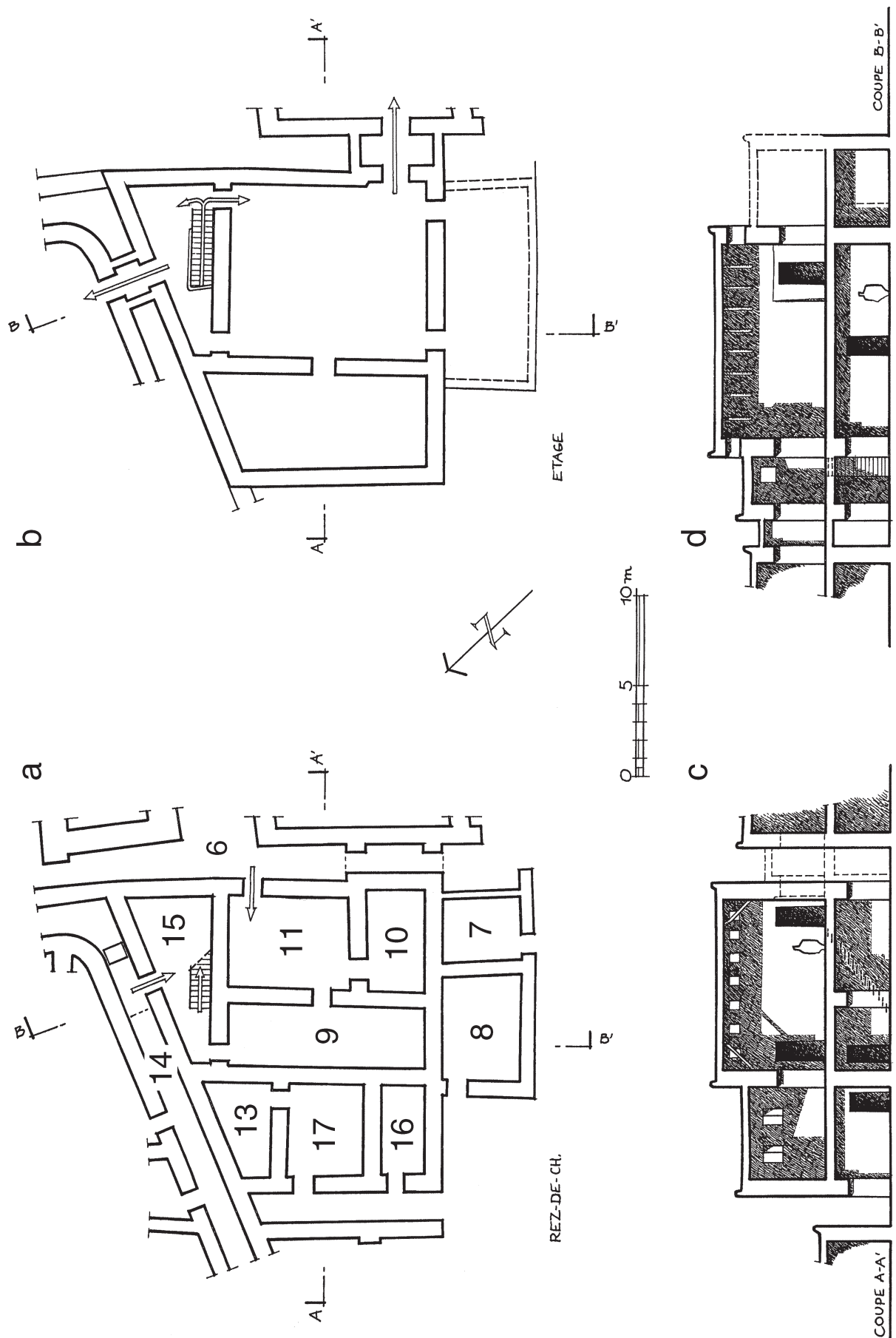


Figure 72: Plans and cross-sections of the administrative centre of the High Priest (City II).





*Figure 73: The building housing the administrative centre of the High Priest.*

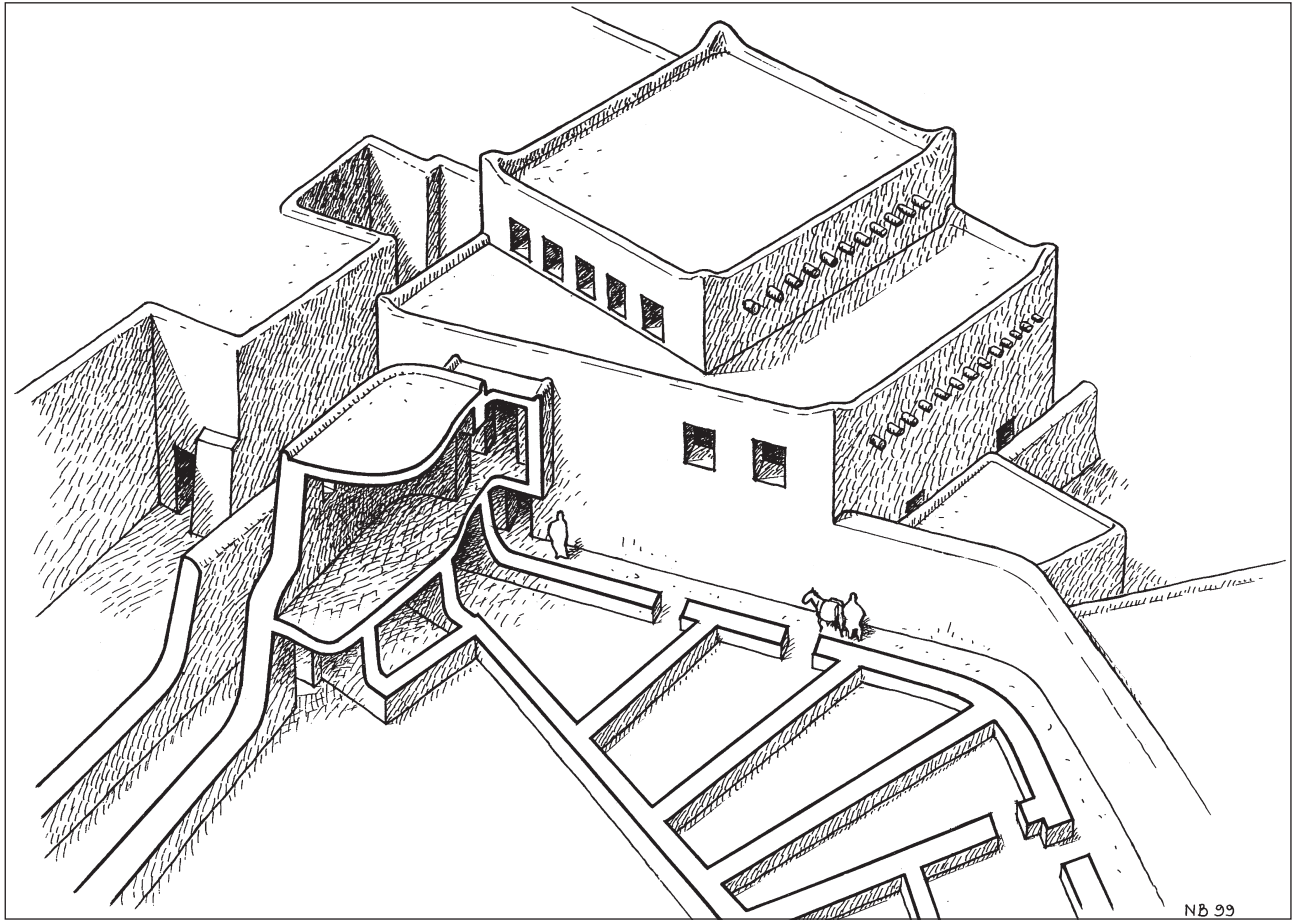


*Figure 74: Beginning of stairway in the northern part of the administrative centre.*

floor, because it would have provided, even when covered, air and light to the whole building; when it does not exist, this implies that outlets, air and light for the house would have been sought on the periphery for each of the sub-units; also, the upper floor would have occupied an area equal to that of the ground floor.

It is also differentiated by its integration into the urban fabric; a house with a central space would have occupied a quarter of the city containing houses of the same type, with a closed façade on the street, private but in relation with the city. The model without a central space, however, needed open spaces on its entire perimeter because of its





*Figure 75: Volumetric reconstruction of the administrative centre of the High Priest (City II).*



*Figure 76: Domestic altar (City II).*

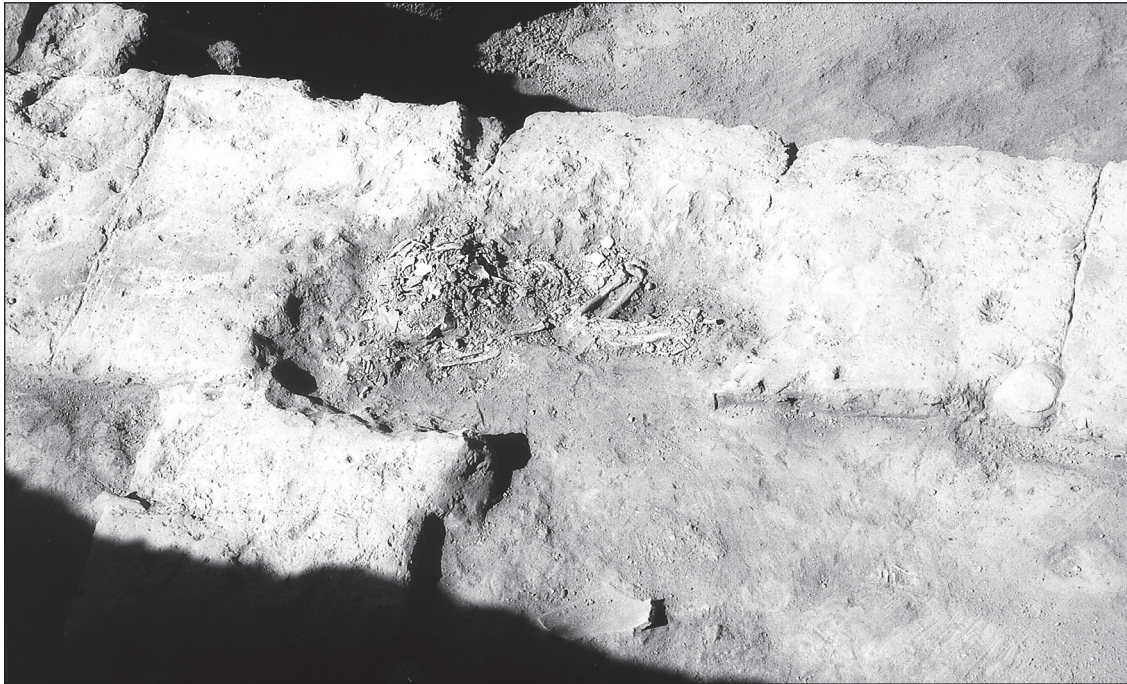


Figure 77: Tomb of a child in the first course of the foundation of a potter's workshop in City III.

several outlets; it could not be integrated into a traditional urban system and is thus a reflection of a particular situation in the city, in this case related to religion.

The House of Artisanal Installations is clearly completely distinctive from the three others. Its large size and its structure, in spite of the presence of a small central space, are quite different from those of the Red House or the House of the Souk. It is probable that the several functions of this house provide an explanation for its organisation according to different principles.

### Common characteristics of the domestic architecture

Except for the House of Artisanal Installations, which probably covers 750m<sup>2</sup>, the surface area of the houses appears to average between 125 and 170m<sup>2</sup>; with the surface of the upper floor this area reaches 200 to 250m<sup>2</sup>, which probably represents the space necessary for a family of good social status at Mari in the middle of the third millennium.

The number of rooms, with variable surface areas, arranged around a central space, lies between 5 and 10, but the House of Artisanal Installations probably had at least 20.

The identifiable functions are always the same: "kitchens" and "washrooms", which points to the basic fact that for most of the ground-floor rooms, there is no determinable function, other than that of cooking or of elementary ablutions.

It must thus be presumed that the ground floor had several functions, non-specific, which leave clear traces only rarely: storage of food supplies in the darkest places,

away from heat (thus on the ground floor of a house without windows, but with holes for aeration or ventilation). Except by accident, no traces of sacks of wheat, bundles of wool or supplies of oil would have been left, aside from a few jars usually reduced to fragments. It should also be considered that the urban house could provide shelter, at least at night, for sheep and especially donkeys, whose use was daily and absolutely normal within the city. Domestic altars also found their place there (fig. 76).

### The upper floor

What was the function of the upper floor? The additional floor space implies diversified use for all domestic occupations. If the ground floor naturally became a place for storage in the farthest removed areas, and a place for the use of water and for cooking food near the entranceway, the upper floor (accessible by a stairway placed near the entrance) that encircled the well of air and light of the central space, with windows looking on the street, was the place for family life, for receiving guests, but also included farther rooms that provided necessary privacy.

### The workshops (fig. 68 [e])

Except for the artisanal installations in the house of this name, little direct evidence exists for workshops of the city in this period. It is possible that the sector of the Souk contains such evidence, but the artisanal activities cannot yet be defined.

The presence of workshops in the House of Artisanal Installations leads to the question of whether this was



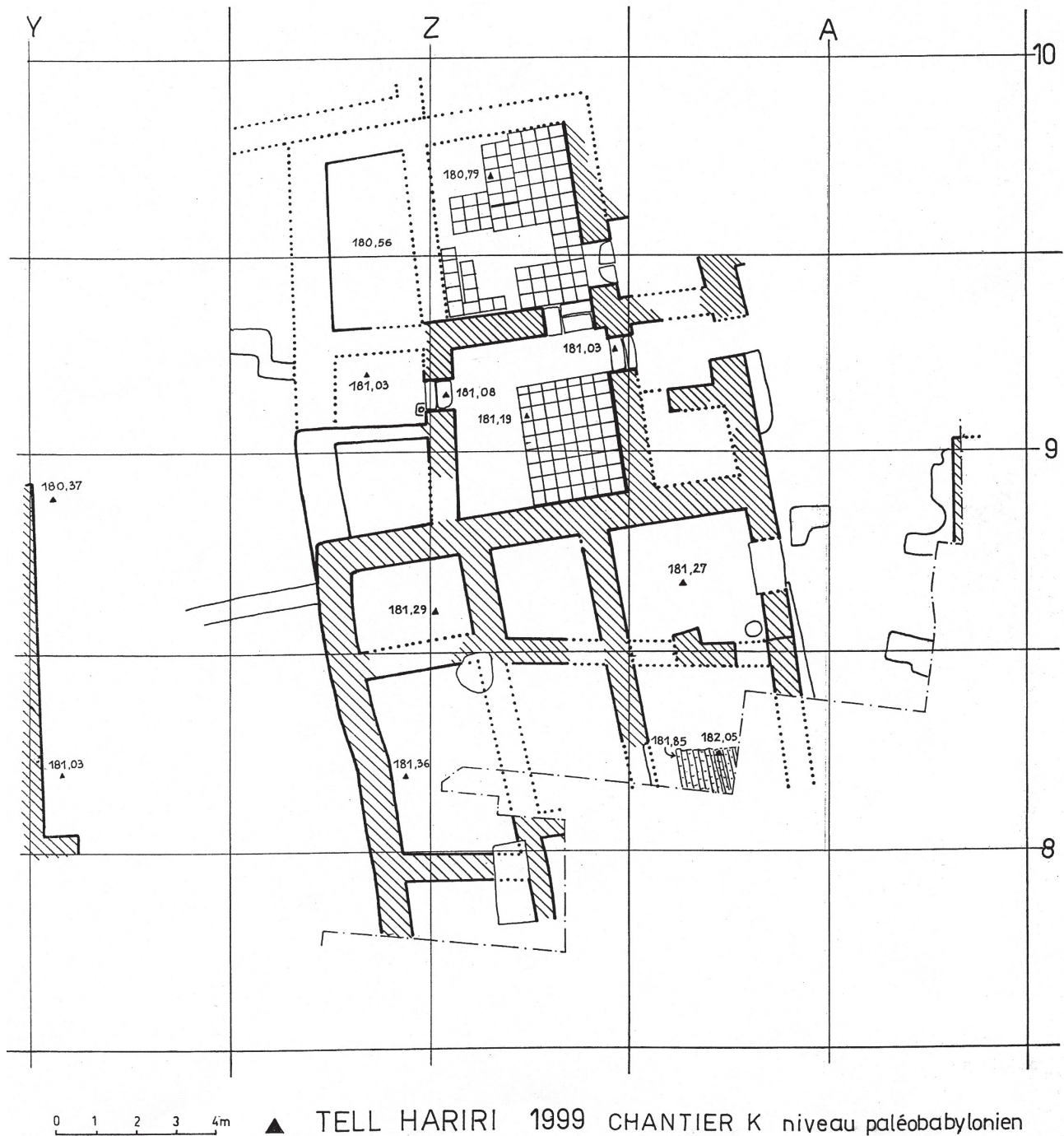


Figure 78: The Old Babylonian house of excavation area K (City III).

the private home of a person or persons who developed particular activities such as dyeing, or a centre dependent upon a temple or other authority. The presence of tablets concerning the distribution of barley suggests workers in a highly regulated system; the bakery implies the necessity of feeding such workers. Moreover, the fragment of a mythological text suggests the presence of a *scriptorium*, an intellectual centre, an enterprise dependent upon a temple. It is tempting to interpret this building as a place of artisanal

activities on the ground floor and an administrative centre associated with a *scriptorium* on the upper floor.

### Conclusion

The information concerning domestic buildings in City II is not extensive; however, the diversity of solutions retained and the variety of living conditions and occupations of the inhabitants have been illuminated. The evidence has

also thrown light on daily life in the middle of the third millennium.

### Houses and residences of City III

No complete house of the city of the *Shakkanakku* has been excavated, but sometimes parts of a house or foundations have been found, usually of very good quality. In the period of the Amorite dynasty, two residences of which we have only the foundations and one house illustrate the domestic architecture.

#### *The pottery workshop*

Situated in excavation area F, only three spaces were found, which do not form a coherent whole: two small rooms (2.50 m by 3 m) separated by a wall that in a first stage ensured communication between them. Each had a door on the north, opening onto a space of which none of the three other sides can be defined, probably open to the sky; a partly destroyed kiln and the place for the potter's wheel – a circular pit with a slab marking the spot for the potter – were found here.

Two children's tombs discovered in the foundation walls of this workshop are exceptional (fig. 77); aged two years or a little older, they lay in a foetal position on the first course of the foundation, each accompanied by a little vase on the body, a beaker near the head and an *unio* shell. Was it a child sacrifice for the building of a house? But why a double sacrifice? We have hardly any evidence for such a rite in this period in Mesopotamia or in Syria, but archaeologists are not in the habit of studying foundations course by course.

#### *The foundations of the two large residences of the period of the Amorite dynasty*

The first was excavated by André Parrot before the Second World War during the sixth campaign. Situated east of the Sacred Way at the same height as the great sanctuaries, it was only partially excavated (40 m by 40 m). Although its east and north faces are unknown, the most striking characteristic of this building is the group formed by the large space measuring 16 m by 14 m – probably a courtyard – bordered on its south side by a hall of 15 m by 6 m; even though it was already in use earlier, this is characteristic of the architecture of the beginning of the second millennium, used in particular as a reception hall. The foundation walls are massive, reaching 2.50 m in thickness; the building would certainly have had an upper storey and been very imposing.

The second residence, discovered by André Parrot but excavated recently, lies to the west of the Great Royal Palace. Erosion has almost everywhere removed the ancient level of occupation, but an interesting study was carried

out on these foundations which revealed the existence of several building procedures and the care taken to construct a particularly complex base in the south-east, as though the house was higher in this place or as though ground movement was feared. However, its plan is much less defined than the first; it corresponds to the principle of a compartmented infrastructure rather than that of a simple foundation network for the residence itself. It is possible that the builders adhered to this principle at a certain point for reasons that are not clear.

It may be asked whether this type of large residence was an urban feature of this period. Apparently it was hardly in use previously, according to the evidence so far. In the period of the *Shakkanakku*, the large buildings – Little Eastern Palace, building E – were probably palatial buildings or rather buildings that belonged to the Palace. These may have been the houses of great families; does this indicate a transformation in the social structure related to the arrival of the Amorites?

#### *The House of the Tablets (excavation area K) (fig. 78)*

To the east of the Great Royal Palace, an excavation undertaken because of a fortuitous discovery on the surface of the tell brought to light a level of the Amorite period with two houses. Because of the proximity of the level to the surface, only a few elements of the architecture are clear, but it has been possible to comprehend the structure approximately.

The first of these houses produced a fairly large amount of tablets, found in a fill between two floors. In very bad condition because of their location and their proximity to the surface, they confirm that this house belongs to the period of the Amorite dynasty; this was already determined by a brick inscribed with the name of Zimri-Lim, although this could have been the result of a reoccupation. It is possible, but this would have to be confirmed by future study of the evidence, that this building may have served as a school, because many round, convex tablets were found mixed with the usual kind.

With a surface area of about 170 m<sup>2</sup> each, these houses are in the category of urban houses constrained by limited space.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the poverty of this evidence, due to the fact that City III has been greatly eroded since the destruction of the city by Hammurabi, a conclusion must not be drawn that there was no urban fabric in a city empty of inhabitants, containing only palaces and temples. The frequency of tombs present beneath the houses, now found near the surface, and the number of catch pits indicates that the space was entirely occupied by dwellings.

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## VI. The religious monuments

Religious life at Mari is known only for Cities II and III. No temple has been found in City I, with the possible exception of the building in trench G, a superb monument that appears by its situation and the fullness of its conception to be a religious building, either a temple or the edge of a terrace intended for religious purposes, possibly sacrifices (cf. below in the same sector, the Massif Rouge in City II and the High Terrace in City III), built on the first level of occupation in the heart of the city.

The origins of the religious forms remain obscure. Given the deeply Syrian character of religious expression at Mari present from the middle of the third millennium, this is a serious gap, which for the time being prevents exact definition of the original features of the beliefs and religious practices of this metropolis on the Euphrates.

### **The religious organisation of City II**

The religious organisation of the city consisted of a concentration of a large number of sanctuaries and an administrative centre at the heart of the city, and it is also possible that isolated temples existed outside the urban fabric (fig. 49).

### ***The religious heart of the city***

The large concentration of religious buildings of various kinds, near the middle of the tell, leads to the conclusion that a domain of the gods existed within the ancient city. But this is quite difficult to define precisely, as no edge has been found and it is not known how it was associated with the rest of the city, or even whether a true temenos existed. Moreover, the nature of the constructions situated

under the High Terrace of the second millennium and under the temple of Lions is completely unknown, which leaves a blank area at the centre of the religious sector.

In the present state of our knowledge, the religious centre was organised around two hubs – the Sacred Precinct to the west and the Massif Rouge to the east – and a north-south line defined by the Sacred Way (fig. 59). To the west of the street that runs from the eastern edge of the Massif Rouge lie the temples of Ninhursag and Shamash and to the east the sanctuaries of Ishtar and Ninni-Zaza; but were there temples to the north of these? The nature of the constructions that preceded the later Anonymous Temples, at the beginning of City II, is still unknown, in spite of recent but uncompleted research.

However, the presence of a quarter for administrative management with a specialised building and storerooms, between the Massif Rouge and the Sacred Precinct, which was probably the domain of a high priest, confers true originality on this world of the gods at Mari (figs. 72, 75)

### ***A temple in the city***

The discovery of a temple dedicated to the goddess Ishtar (fig. 79 [f]), on the edge of the city and built against, it appears, an interior rampart, demonstrates that divinities at Mari could have a place in ordinary parts of the city and that their worship was not restricted to a reserved area. There are probably other temples scattered over the urban territory. The grouping of places of worship at the centre of the city indicates the pre-eminence of the divine, and temples placed within the urban fabric demonstrates an osmosis between the human and the divine and the belonging of all the territory of the city to its god.



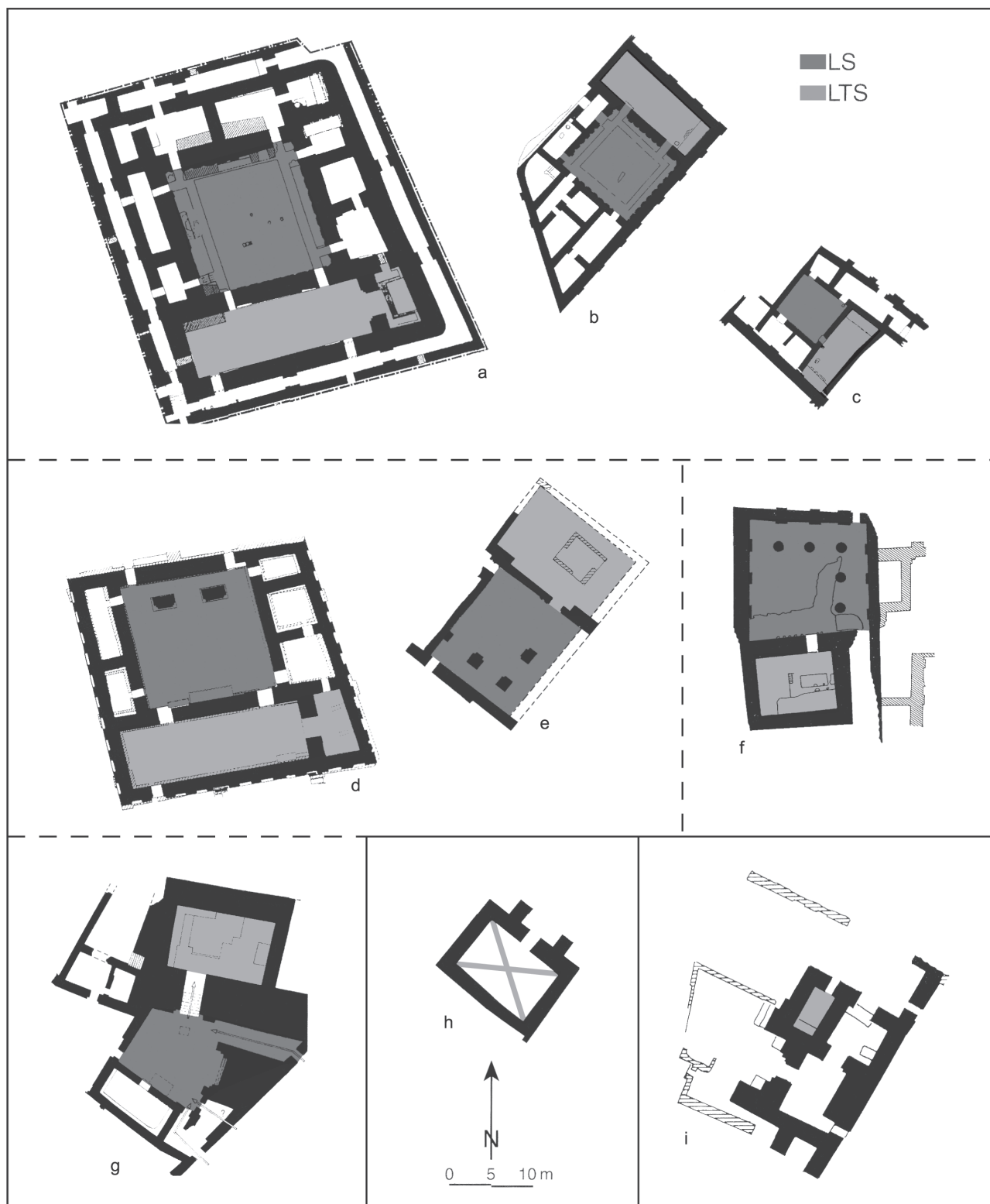


Figure 79: Plans of the temples and sanctuaries of City II: a formula peculiar to Mari. [a] Sacred Precinct P-3/P-1; [b] Ninnizaza; [c] Ishtarat; [d] Sacred Precinct P-0; [e] Shamash; [f] Ishtar; [g] Ninhursag; [h] temple-tower of the Massif Rouge; [i] Anonymous Temples.

## The Mari model of the temple in City II

### *The main temples found in City II (fig. 79)*

#### Temple in the Sacred Precinct (fig. 79 [d])

This must be mentioned here as it is a temple, even though it should be studied together with the palace (cf. *infra*); it differs from the others in two respects: its much larger size and its integration into a palace. It was probably also consecrated to the great god of the city.

#### Temple of Ishtar (figs. 79 [f], 80)

The first building excavated at Mari (1934 to 1937 campaigns), one month after the beginning of work, the temple of Ishtar certainly suffered from the inexperience of the workers in the detection of mud brick and the definition of floors.

The re-examination of the architecture of levels a, b and c (according to André Parrot) led to a simplification, as only two monuments were present in succession at the same spot. The analysis of the published plans and the photographs shows that levels c and b are mixed; they are not two superimposed buildings but only one that had been repaired from time to time. However, intermediate floors are numerous and repairs of religious installations frequent, particularly the tubs.

Dedicated to a “virile Ishtar” which was certainly not the first form of the great goddess, the situation of the temple in the city can be explained by its association with the rampart.

Temple 1 was built on a levelled area of City I. But its whole plan is poorly known, all the more so as its annexes clearly belong to the second level of City I and not to City II. The eastern part of the temple thus remains unknown.

Only two spaces remain, set together and communicating through a door to form the temple. The first is slightly trapezoidal in plan, roughly 13 m per side, with certain walls punctuated by regularly spaced pilasters. 2.5 m from the north and east walls two colonnades of three pillars were placed, including the angle pillar that ensured the junction (five in all), which creates a right-angle gallery. The second space, rectangular in shape (9.5 m × 7.5 m), is surrounded by a wall about 2 m thick and partly occupied by a low podium covered by plaster and equipped with “barcasses”, boat-shaped libation receptacles, which were frequently repaired.

How should this group be interpreted? The room with the podium would appear to be a Very Holy Place, and the first room, with boat-shaped receptacles, chest and bitumen-covered plaques, appears to be the Holy Place. It thus appears that this is the heart of a sanctuary. However, the placement of the entrance is uncertain, although the temple of Ishtar 2 indicates a natural opening through a corridor leading towards the east to the street of the Ishtar temple, and may have followed the plan of temple 1, a

plausible situation.

An important question remains: was the Holy Place open to the sky or covered? For the excavator, and this has never been really contested, it is a courtyard with a portico on two sides. The portico would have provided clerestory lighting, and enabled reduction of the span from 13 to 11 m, a span which the architects would have known how to cover. Understood in this way, this building, even cut off from its eastern quarter, can be included in the series of temples at Mari.

André Parrot’s levels a, b and c present rather strange aspects with stone walls that follow quite exactly elements of the earlier line; at this level of stone there would have been a kind of levelling to ensure a reconstruction, of which nothing remains, but which follows the lines of the Very Holy Place and the Holy Place of the Ishtar 1 temple, the interior stone wall of the Holy Place being assimilated with a stylobate for the columns of a new portico.

The question that remains difficult to resolve is the date of this remaking. The material has not produced any indications because of the proximity of the surface level. If most of the Early Dynastic III material is attributed to temple 2, it would be possible to presume, with great caution, a remaking in the Akkadian period, but evidence is lacking and the question is best left open.

#### Temple of Ninni-zaza (figs. 79 [b], 81, 82)

To the east of the Sacred Way, facing the temple of Ninhursag, stands the temple of Ninni-Zaza (1952 and 1953 campaigns). It is complete, and after some rectifications provides us with a fairly good picture of the organisation of a sanctuary of this period at Mari.

Dedicated to the goddess Ninni-zaza, perhaps an avatar of Ishtar, this sanctuary is situated on the edge of the Sacred Way and of the Street of the Model. Its plan is simple: a central space, with a refined and delicate decoration of niches and salients in double projection, almost square (9.80 m by 10.80 m), accessible from the vestibule that links the building to the Sacred Way; all the rooms are disposed along three of its sides. Stone-lined alleys covered with bitumen link the face-to-face doors, providing a place of circulation on the perimeter of the central space. A long rectangular hall (14 m by 5 m) extends along its north-east flank.

Seven rooms that are isolated or grouped by two or three, all accessible from the central space, form annexes, with *tannour* (ovens) and a stairway. At least two levels, if not three, were detected.

This temple is well-known for its collection of statuettes, unfortunately broken and recorded without great precision.

Two questions concerning the architecture remain. The first is related to the central space which could be considered to be a courtyard. For the same reasons that led to the recognition of a covered hall in the central space of the Sacred Precinct, it is thought impossible that here there could have been a courtyard in the centre of the building; it

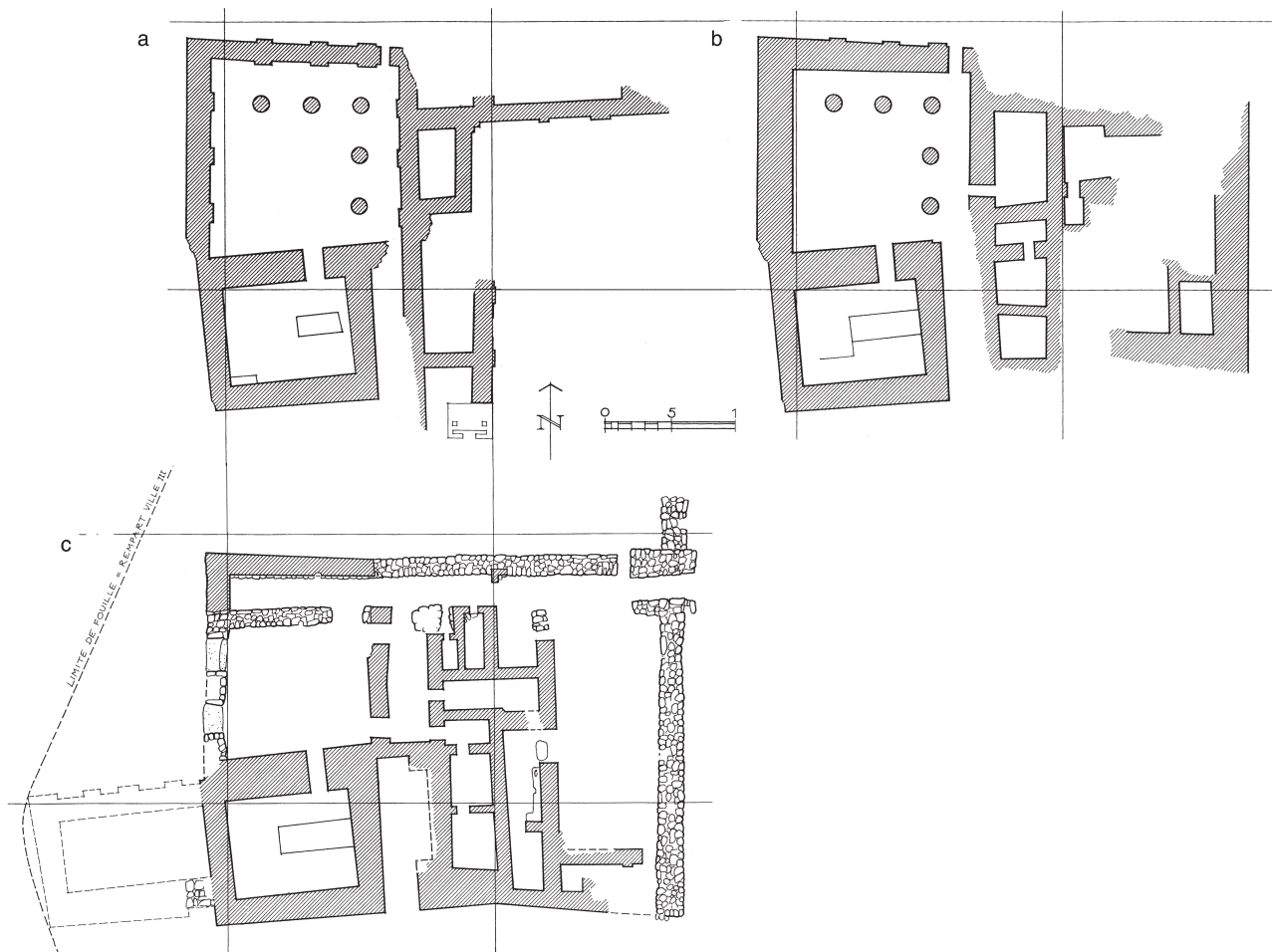


Figure 80: The different stages of the temple of Ishtar.

would not have resisted the weather. The second question concerns the starting point of the stairway discovered in room 16, a little room situated in the western angle; does it lead to the terrace? The direction that it takes after the landing at the angle makes this hypothesis hardly credible; it is much more likely that it enabled access to a storey that developed on the southern and western annexes, as is implied by the general height preserved. Such a conclusion modifies the image that we have up to now of sanctuaries in general and of Mari in particular and should lead to re-examination of how they functioned.

### Temple of Ishtarat (fig. 79 [c])

Set against the temple of Ninni-zaza, the temple of Ishtarat (1952–1953 campaigns), another avatar of Ishtar, was also designed around a central space (6 m each side), without decoration, and reproduces the plan of a simple house; however, broken boat-shaped libation receptacles and statuettes provide identification. Carbonised beams lay in the central space, evidence for a covered hall rather than a courtyard, which is the usual interpretation. This is a field observation that confirms the architectural analysis that the

central spaces of this period were covered. The height of the ruins found and the contiguity of the temple of Ninni-zaza confirm that there would have been an upper storey.

### Temple of Shamash (fig. 79 [e], 83)

Immediately south of the temple of Ninhursag, the temple of Shamash (excavated between 1951 and 1954), presents a very simple plan: a Holy Place that is square in shape, 15 m each side, with a gallery along the south and east walls, which indicates that the spans were 10 m in each direction; in the north is evidence for a long hall, of which few elements remain today, probably because most of it has been disturbed by later reconstructions. A rectangular pit (3.80 m by 1.80 m), in the centre of the Very Holy Place, is an exploratory hole probably made by Yahdun-Lim at the time he ordered works for the foundation of a new temple to ensure that nothing impure risked compromising the new work.

### Temple of Ninhursag (fig. 79 [g], 83)

In the sector studied between 1951 and 1954 and taken up



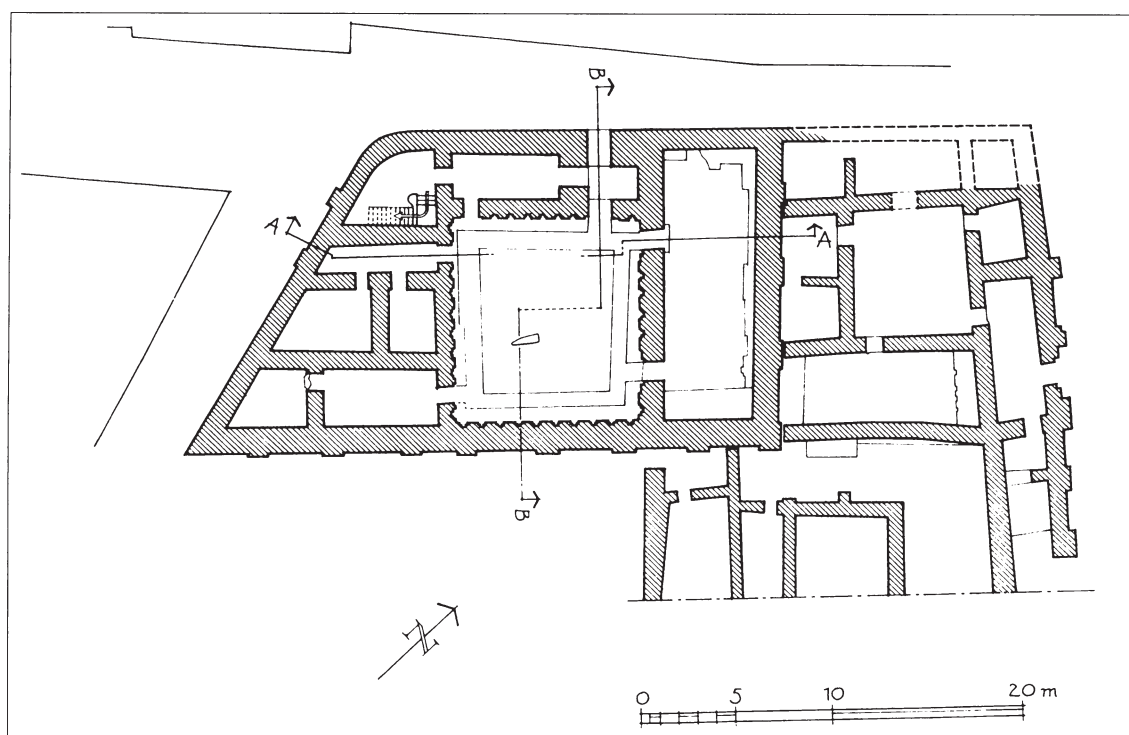


Figure 81: The temple of Ninni-zaza (City II).

again starting in 1990, the temple of City II attributed to Ninhursag as a hypothesis is still incompletely defined. A central space, very irregular in shape, was equipped with religious installations – various platforms, sometimes surrounded by grooves coated with bitumen. On the south there are rooms of different dimensions, while on the north a fine stairway leads to an upper level occupied by the Very Holy Place. The annexes are equipped with benches which supported statues (a base found *in situ*), jars or *tannour*.

The Very Holy Place is striking because of its massiveness, the thickness of its walls – 4 m – and its raised position in the group of constructions. It is accessed by an imposing stairway of a dozen low steps, which are placed in the thickness of the south wall and rise to a height of about 80 cm. This dominant position of the Very Holy Place is quite unusual. The interior chamber, 7 by 9 m, is occupied by a very large low podium, backed against the north wall, and by religious installations, including a large basin set against the west wall and benches with boat-shaped libation receptacles; the eastern part had been practically destroyed before the excavation.

Sixty stone vessels, thirty shells, a superb wild boar head carved in shell, a handle cut from bone and a remarkable stele lay in the *favissae* (ritual deposits) around the low podium. In certain walls were found a thousand small stone beads, shells of different types in their original state, hearts of shells probably intended for making small objects, cylindrical beads or cylinder seals, elements of worked shell (a series of uncompleted rings, the lower arm of a

statuette, a small plaque representing an ox with the head turned to the side), and a tiny idol in pale green stone in the tradition of the end of Uruk. These objects are a kind of “treasure” from an artisan specialised in working shell, in all a curious mixture of objects from City I and City II.

The extraordinary massiveness of the walls of the Very Holy Place, 4 metres in thickness, the complete disharmony of the orientation of the Very Holy Place and that of the temple, the shape of the Holy Place (a regular trapezoid) and the size of the deposits suggest that the Very Holy Place had existed before all the rest and that the whole of the sanctuary has a long and complicated history, starting with City I.

### *A formula peculiar to Mari (fig. 79)*

These six sanctuaries represent a very important part of the vestiges of City II. Except for a few variations, they are organised in an identical manner, based on the tri-partition characteristic of ancient Near Eastern sacred architecture, but according to a model peculiar to Mari.

The entranceway is obviously only a break in the continuity of the wall that encloses the temple; it is not particularly different from the gate of another type of building. But it possesses symbolic weight, indicated by the insertion of a foundation deposit related to its particular nature, such as the slab hidden in the foundation wall under the threshold of the temple of Ninni-zaza.

The Holy Place, always a central space, can appear

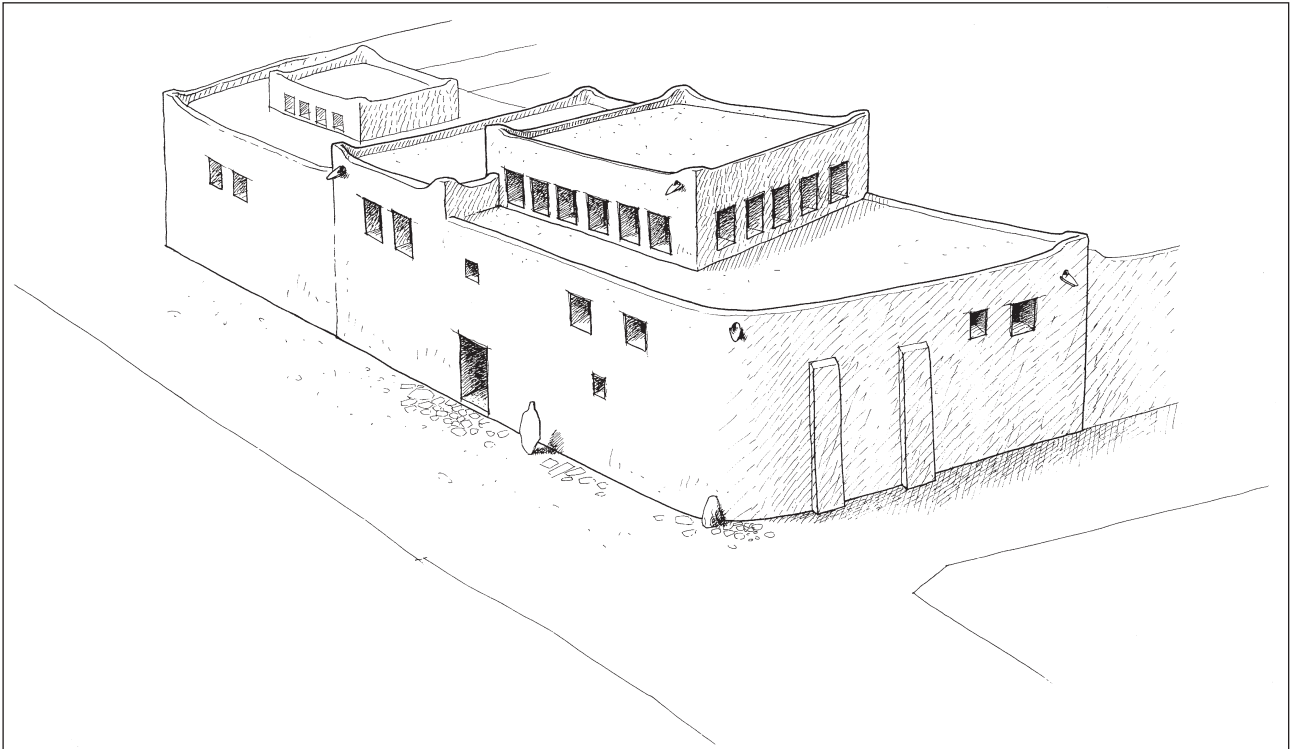


Figure 82: Volumetric reconstruction of the temple of Ninni-zaza (City II).

in two slightly different forms: usually a square, even a rhomboid (Sacred Precinct, Ninni-zaza, Ishtar), and sometimes modified by the insertion of a portico on two sides (Ishtar, Shamash), or exceptionally on one side (level P-0 of the Sacred Precinct); an irregular central space is more rare (Ninhursag).

The Very Holy Place appears in two very different forms: a long and narrow hall, built against one of the sides of the central space (Ninni-zaza, Shamash, Sacred Precinct), and an almost square plan surrounded by a very thick wall (Ishtar, Ninhursag).

No example having this organisation other than Mari has been found. It may be considered characteristic of this city on the Euphrates.

### The particular case of the Massif Rouge and its temple-tower (fig. 83)

#### *The Massif Rouge*

This is a High Terrace rectangular in shape (42 by 29 m) which owes its name to the red colour of some of the bricks that form its core. The original height is difficult to evaluate; the vestiges hardly rise above 3 or 4 metres. The access, not defined during the excavation, could have been by means of a ramp laid against the south-east face of the terrace, exactly in the line of continuation of the Sacred Way. There is no indication that a temple existed on the top

of the terrace, which probably served as a religious area for carrying out sacrifices serving all the temples of the city; detailed analysis of the temples shows that it would not have been possible for sacrificial rites to have taken place in them (fig. 59).

A series of niches and salients, in high relief on the north-west face, indicates the existence of two states of building, but others could have existed (fig. 84).

#### *The temple-tower*

This is an imposing building (excavated in 1952 and 1960) of rectangular shape (exterior measurement 12.50 m by 14.50 m), consisting of one room (11 m by 7 m) preceded by a vestibule in the form of a porch. The orientation of this edifice, which opens to the north-east, is identical to that of the High Terrace; moreover, its width is exactly one third the length of the terrace and the surface area occupied is placed precisely in the central third of this length (figs. 79 [h], 85).

Without the offering tables, boat-shaped libation receptacles and podiums against walls that are usually found, it was not recognised as a temple during the excavation, but the austerity of its proportions and its morphology identify it as a typical temple-tower in the Syrian tradition, and indicate its close association with the High Terrace, even though the phase is a late one of City II.

Thus these two structures form a pair, High Terrace and temple-tower, that was clearly one of the religious hubs.

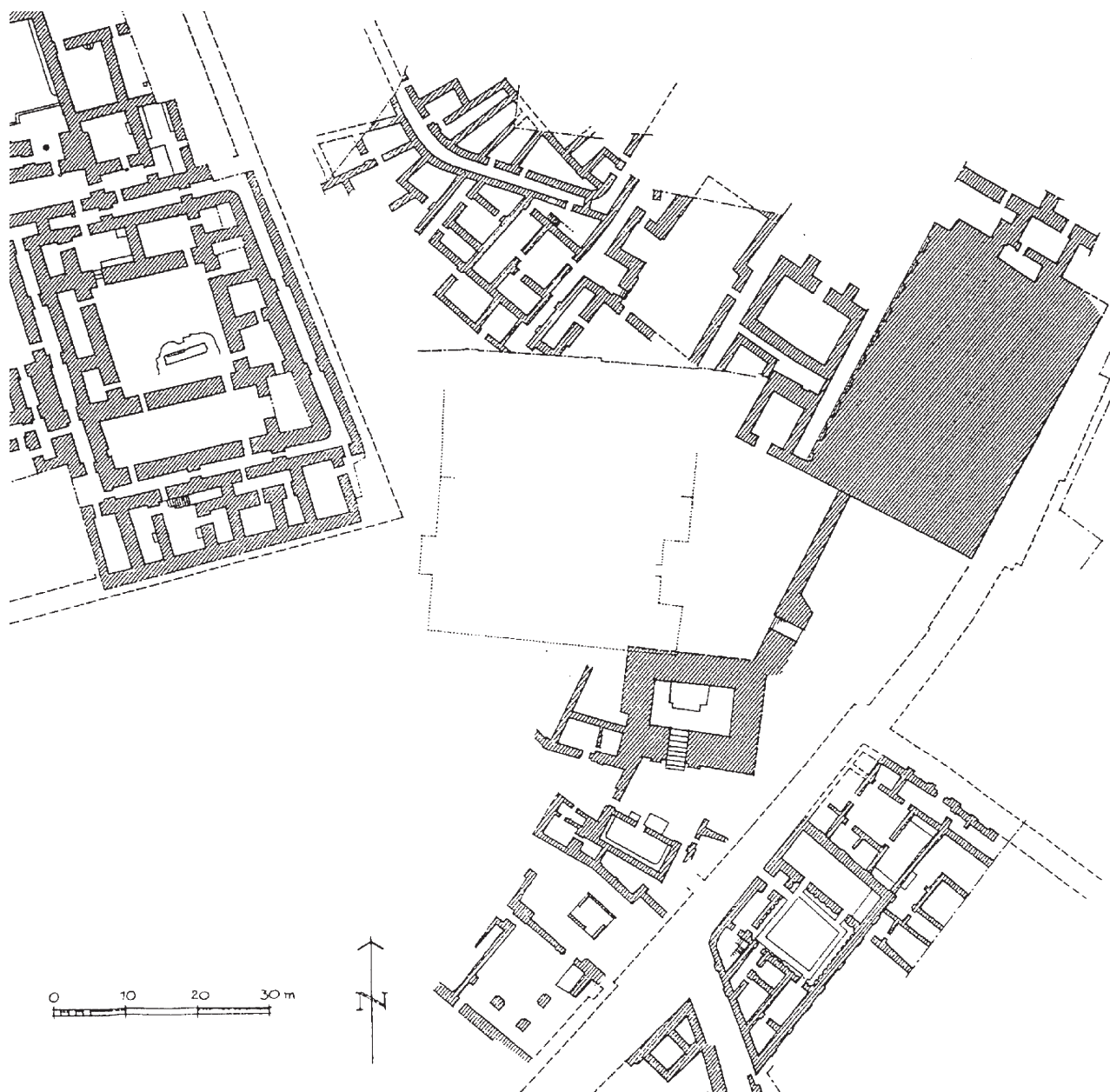


Figure 83: The sector of the temples of City II.

### ***The administrative centre of the temple quarter (figs. 72, 73, 74)***

In the religious heart of the city, between the temple of the Massif Rouge and the Sacred Precinct, a group of buildings was constructed that included living quarters, warehouses and annexes with various functions. It appears to have been a sophisticated dwelling in the middle of storerooms with economic purposes. Because of its situation and the material found, the possibility that it was an administrative centre in the sacred quarter, in the hands of a (or the) High Priest, would appear to be logical.

On two levels and without a central space, the house was on the ground floor a hub for the different quarters

of the city, and on the upper level equipped with a fine reception hall, the starting point for another system of relating to its environment.

The material found on the floors or in the collapse – pottery, remains of a mosaic panel of exceptional quality, eight tablets, clay seal impressions, a small clay statue – are evidence of both religious life and administrative activity.

The occupant of the house could thus have had access to the storerooms and to the religious areas. The two areas of circulation, following corridors 14 and 6, joined at the foot of the stairway, which provided access to the upper storey. There the master of the house could live, administrate and receive. From there, he could, without descending to the





Figure 84: Western façade of the Massif Rouge (City II).

lower level, access the areas above the storehouses and the upper level of the buildings that occupied the sacred sector.

This house thus appears to have been a veritable hub in the centre of a quarter that was subtly and perfectly ordered. All the administrative life of the religious complex was dominated from the upper storey. It is the entire economic and social aspect of the religious life of the city in the middle of the third millennium that was concentrated behind this quarter of modest appearance.

## Activity in the temples of City II

### *The material recovered*

Votive objects were found, particularly statuettes of worshippers (fig. 86), which are rarely discovered *in situ*; some carry an inscription on the back at the height of the right shoulder. These were often placed on benches in the Very Holy Place, but such gifts were also offered to the divinity in subsidiary halls; weapons, stone vessels and possibly cylinder seals were also found. The role of the betyl of the temple of Ninni-zaza is more difficult to define (fig. 87).

There are objects for religious celebration that belonged to the divinity, made in the most precious materials, as well as objects of everyday life: various vessels and recipients, in pottery or carved in stones imported from afar, hachets, spindle whorls, sharpeners in stone and in bronze. Lance points, knives, daggers and short swords should perhaps be placed in the category of votive objects, especially when found in the “virile” temple of Ishtar.

Finally, there are figurative mosaic panels representing scenes of war and religious scenes, unfortunately always found broken.

### *The religious installations*

During the period of the second city of Mari, there was an important development in the installations used for religious purposes.

At the beginning, the apparatus for libations and low podiums was standard, as seen in the Sacred Precinct. In certain temples – Ishtar, Ninni-zaza, Ishtar, Ninhursag – this equipment lasted until the final destructive fire. But “altars” appear (level P-1 of the Sacred Precinct) that are free-standing (fig. 88) or backed against a wall as well as podiums backed against a wall, while the installations for libation (figs. 89, 90, 91) appear to diminish in number or become transformed. In level P-0 the change is confirmed.

It seems that no such development has been observed elsewhere, but the use of the backed-up platform is often older, according to the evidence, for example in the temple of Sin at Khafadjé. It is certain that at Mari this transformation marks an important development in the rites, but without any change necessary in the spaces used; the Holy Place remained the place of offering, the Very Holy Place that of the divine throne. Was this the result of an exterior influence or was it an endogenous development?

### *Religious life in the temple*

The temple was the house of the god, where humans ensured



*Figure 85: Temple-tower to the west of the Massif Rouge.*



*Figure 86: Base of statuette still in place on a raised surface in an annex of the temple of Ninhursag.*

that the god was served, a task for which they believed they were created. These services included, according to fixed and meticulous rituals (basin for lustration, fig. 92) throughout the day, the provision of food in various forms, both liquid and solid, dressing the statue with ornaments and jewellery, and the organisation of celebrations.

### ***The annexes and the upper storey***

The surface area of the annexes is not very large, approximately two-fifths of the total of the Sacred Precinct (150<sup>2</sup> m usable) or of the temple of Ninni-zaza (72 m<sup>2</sup> usable). But analysis of the ground floor plans does not provide enough of a picture, and the annexes were not so limited as might appear. The Sacred Precinct and the



*Figure 87: The betyl of the temple of Ninni-zaza.*





Figure 88: Altar in the Sacred Precinct, level P-1.



Figure 89: Slabs for libation in the Sacred Precinct, level P-2.

temple of Ninni-zaza have provided clear evidence for the presence of an upper storey, usually built – but this is not an absolute rule – on the part of the building not occupied by the most sacred spaces. That which is true for these two buildings could have been so for the others, and in this case, the useful surface would have been doubled: with 140 to 150 m<sup>2</sup> at the temple of Ninni-zaza and more than 300 m<sup>2</sup> in the only building considered to be the sanctuary of the Sacred Precinct, the possibilities of accommodation



Figure 90: Bronze jars buried up to the neck in the floor of the Sacred Precinct, level P-2, intended to receive libations.

are more ample. Thus the temple became a house for those in whose care it was, day and night; in these conditions it would be normal to find objects of everyday life.

### ***The function of the Massif Rouge: the place of sacrifice***

Once the central spaces became covered rooms and no longer courtyards, there were no more open spaces in any of these temples; thus there were no more spaces for sacrifices, which could only take place in the open air. If the spaces of the temple did not offer the possibility of carrying out a sacrifice, they must have taken place elsewhere. The Massif Rouge, established at the top of the religious domain, could well have taken on this function for all the temples of the city.





Figure 91: Boat-shaped libation receptacle ("barcasse") in excavation area G found in 1997, temple of Ninhursag.



Figure 92: Basin for lustration in the Sacred Precinct, level P-2.

### ***Conclusion: the religious activity of City II***

The urban fabric of City II of Mari is clearly impregnated by this religious universe. The Massif Rouge and its temple-tower, the temples of Ninni-zaza, Ishtar, Ninhursag and Shamash in the religious quarter and that of Ishtar in the city are evidence for the intensity of religious life, as is the administrative centre of the High Priest. What is the

most striking, because it appears at the present time to be the only example in Mesopotamia, is that the largest sanctuary of the city was from the time of the foundation of City II both separated from and closely associated with the religious domain, forming the most imposing part of the complex building that adjoined the religious heart of the city. Although the name of the divinity worshipped has



not yet been discovered with certainty, his importance and apparently his supremacy over the other divinities appear to be clear. There is but a step to the presumption that this was the tutelary god of the city. But it has not been possible to provide clear terms of comparison from the Syro-Mesopotamian records or the evidence that we have, which leads to caution in the general interpretation, all the more so as things were to change considerably with City III.

### The religious reorganisation of City III

Our attention has concentrated on the quarter of the temples, as no other sanctuary has been found elsewhere in the city so far. A profound transformation affected the organisation of the religious domain; a new High Terrace, built farther to the west, replaced the Massif Rouge, which was levelled and probably masked by a new sanctuary, itself erased by erosion after the end of Mari. The temple of Lions, an apparently new sanctuary, was placed against the south face of the religious High Terrace, and the esplanade that preceded it covered the Anonymous Temples, which existed only briefly. The *Sahuru*, itself placed against the north face of the new temple-tower of Ninhursag, appears to have been an entrance to the temple of Lions; in the south-east, the situation of the temple of Shamash remained the same.

Thus the esplanade, the *Sahuru* and the temples of Ninhursag and Shamash were aligned along the Sacred Way; on the other side of the road, nothing appears to have replaced the temples of Ninni-zaza and Ishtarat.

### From City II to City III: maintaining tradition

#### *The sanctuary of the Palace*

The sanctuary, embellished with a small chapel, was inherited from the Sacred Precinct. During the construction of the Great Royal Palace it preserved its original morphology, but during the course of its history a large western part was amputated from the central space, which created a new organisation.

#### *The Anonymous Temples*

Strictly speaking, the Anonymous Temples did not belong any more to the second city than to the third; probably built by Iddish, they were both a conclusion to City II and a small first stage of City III. Their situation is very particular and their architectural characteristics make them very close to P-0 (the final phase of occupation of the Palace); they could with P-0 represent Akkadian architecture at Mari. Associated with other buildings that have completely disappeared, in particular under the High Terrace, it is not possible to assign them a precise function.

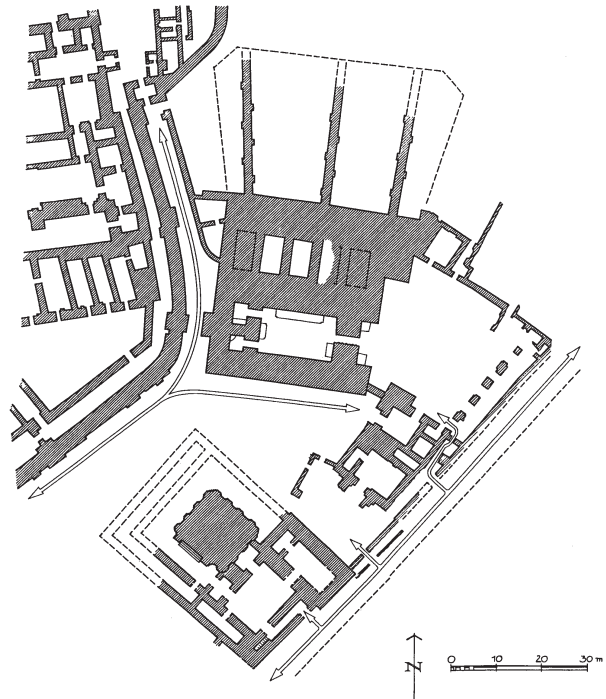


Figure 93: The sector of the temples of City III.

#### *Temple of Shamash (figs 93, 94)*

At the location of the temple of Shamash of City II and in the same position, a sanctuary was constructed by Yahdun-Lim of which only the foundations have been found; the intermediate construction built by the *Shakkanakku* has not left any traces, but it certainly existed, perhaps in several phases. The sanctuary consisted of a large space, about 13 m by 9 m, with two very long rooms on the south-west and the south-east, and hugged on the north-east by a massive building measuring about 20 m by 12.5 m. These are the basic elements and the dimensions of the temples of City II. The tradition of the Mari type of temple with its square Holy Place preceding the long Very Holy Place was thus respected in the middle of the eighteenth c. BC. In the foundations of the Very Holy Place, Yahdun-Lim placed the foundation deposits: nine fired bricks with a  $41 \times 41.5 \times 7$  cm format, each carrying the same text of 157 lines boasting of the action of he who dedicated them, inscribed on the face and the reverse. He also re-buried the previous deposits that had been dug up during the foundation works.

But the construction of the Massif à Redans gave this sanctuary of archaic tradition a new dimension, that of modernity (see below).

#### The innovations of City III (fig. 93)

##### *The Massif à Redans of the temple of Shamash (fig. 94)*

The great originality of the new temple of Shamash comes

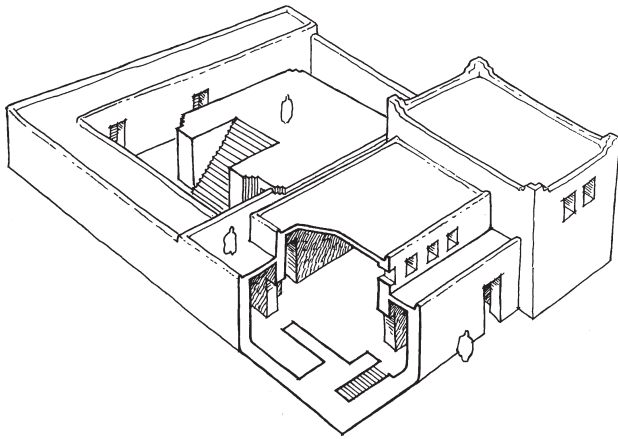


Figure 94: Volumetric reconstruction of the temple of Shamash (City III).

from its association with a religious high terrace, the Massif à Redans, which was clearly built late in the history of this sector. Almost square (15.30 m by 14.30 m), it rose to a height of 1.70 m to 1.90 m. Three of the four faces (south-east, north-east, north-west) were decorated with a series of salient pilasters of great finesse. The fourth face was occupied in its length by a series of four narrow steps set between two pilasters, comparable to a stairway. Would this have been a point of observation, for consultation of the stars or observation of bird flight?

Absolute respect for tradition was this time combined with innovation, represented by the terrace associated with the temple, which places this sanctuary in a series that is well represented in the northern Syro-Mesopotamian world of the second millennium: Tell al-Rimah (Karana), Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (temple of Assur), Tell Atchana (Alalakh).

### *The High Terrace (figs. 59, 60, 61, 93)*

This is the most imposing monument of those located in the heart of the religious quarter; wrongly identified as a ziggurat, it is to be placed in the Syrian category of this type of monument.

Its basic dimensions are 40 m by 20 m, but with its access ramp that occupies the northern face, it reaches a north-south length of 50 m and an east-west width of 40 m, of which more than half consists of an inclined plane. If the width of the temple of Lions is added, a length of nearly 70 m is obtained. The present maximum height is about 5 m above the level of the spread of pebbles, but this is obviously a residual height, from which the original height is difficult to establish.

The terrace is completely built and stabilised by placing courses of logs at regular intervals; an internal compartmentalisation, a construction procedure intended to ensure the cohesion of the whole terrace, was filled in by a bond of well-placed bricks. The ramp was structured by three long walls that start from the north side of the terrace

and diverge slightly. With a width of 1.50 to 2 m, they were provided with reinforcing pilasters that were very regularly placed in alternation on each of the two faces. These walls served to hold back, as a kind of coffering, the earth of the ramp that enabled access to the top of the terrace.

### *The temple of Lions (figs. 93, 95)*

A temple constructed by Ishtup-Ilum (also called the temple of the King of the Land), it appears to have been the major sanctuary in the construction program of the sacred domain.

The plan adopted belongs to the characteristic category of long temples with a porch *in antis*, whose origin lies at the northern border of the Syro-Mesopotamian world, with some features particular to Mari.

The building, constructed on a terrace (height about 1.80 m) that served only as a foundation, is rectangular in plan (35 m by 22 m), oriented approximately west-east with a single opening to the east. With its walls 5 to 6 m thick, it is particularly massive. The access porch is only 1.5 m wide, with a depth of 5 m corresponding to the thickness of the wall. An unusual feature is the presence of two small rooms, unequal in size (2.50 by 2.50 m in the south and 3.50 by 2.5 m in the north), and located behind the small side of the platform backed against the wall and facing the entrance. They are independent and open onto the large hall, each through a door that frames the podium.

The platform backed against the wall, decorated by salients on its façade, forms a particularly imposing god's throne (3.25 m × 1.15 m × 1.13 m) in the line of the access porch. A lower bench runs along the northern wall, and a two-stepped platform, also decorated with salients, is located in the south-east angle. On these were set two bronze lion protomes, which literally protruded from the wall in a remarkable manner, although they were not guardians of the temple.

On the south stile of the door is a worn decoration, observed at the time of excavation; this has been identified as palm trunks, a motif frequently used in the architectural decoration of the beginning of the second millennium.

In front of the entrance to the temple extends a vast esplanade measuring about 35 m by 30 m, oriented according to the direction of the Sacred Way and edged by a long portico, 5 m deep, formed by five pilasters that are about 5 m distant from each other. On the south-west face, the *Sahuru* formed a monumental entrance.

In this very impressive group, there is the question of the initial volume. The height to which the buildings are preserved, the exceptional thickness of the walls (6 m), the surprising relationship between the constructions and the spaces used (surface occupied by the walls is 584 m<sup>2</sup> out of a total of 770 m<sup>2</sup>), the placement against the High Terrace (in perfect alignment), the width of the Very Holy Place (which corresponds to the span of the ceilings), all these data lead to the conclusion that a height of 4 or 5 m, indicative of a building with no upper storey, is not enough and that there must have been an upper storey.



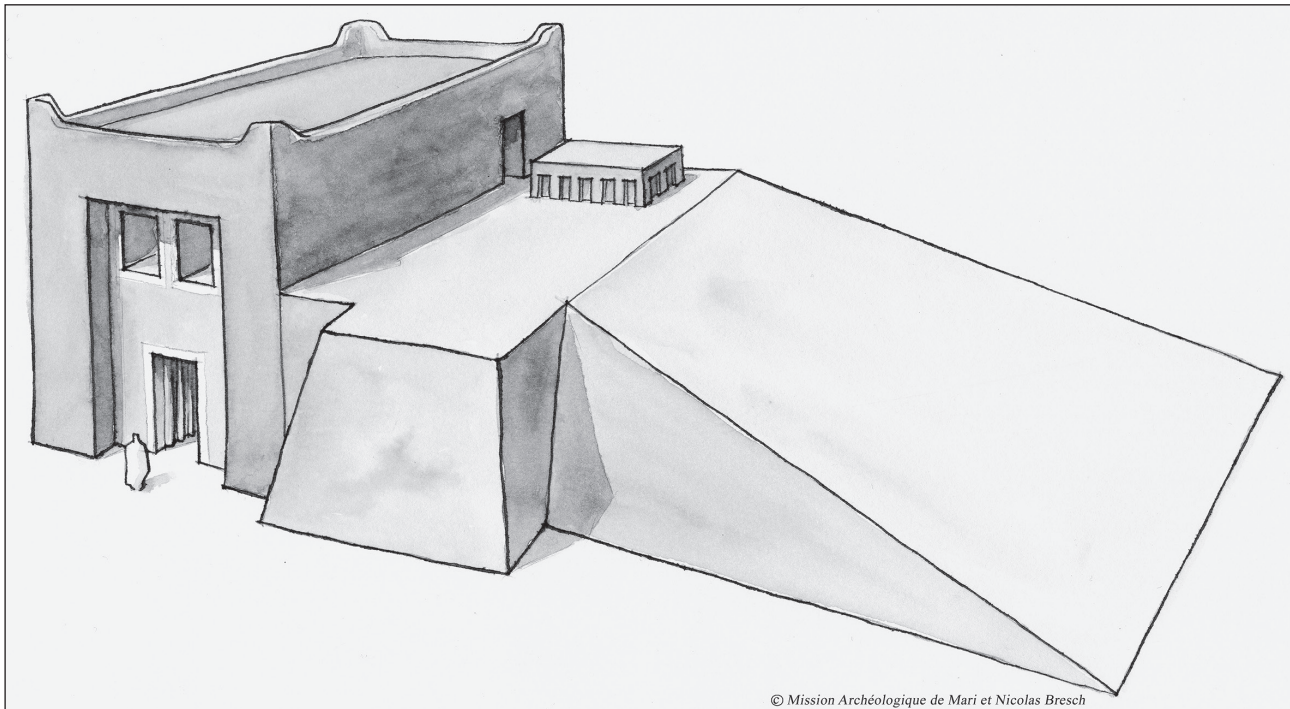


Figure 95: Volumetric reconstruction of the temple of Lions associated with the High Terrace.

In comparing these data to those of the Throne Room, a similar height can be considered for the temple of Lions, which would make this temple the largest in City III, in close symbiosis with the High Terrace; one of the little annexes probably contained a stairway that enabled the High Priest of Sacrifice to access the upper level of the terrace.

Who was the divinity thus honoured in the construction of City III of Mari? The foundation text hidden in the masonry of three of the angles of the temple indicates that “Ishtup-Ilum, *Shakkanaku* of Mari, the son of Ismah-Dagan, *Shakkanaku* of Mari, built the temple of the King of the Land”. Was it Dagan, as first thought? It seems not. It is now thought that it was a young divinity, Adad or Addu, of Syrian origin, who would have been related to Dagan, an old divinity, similar to the relation uniting El and Baal. This is an interesting proposition, but for the moment the god worshipped in the temple of Lions remains hypothetical. One aspect, however, is worth retaining, that he belonged to the Syrian universe.

### ***The temple-tower of Ninhursag (figs. 93, 96)***

This building was constructed above the space occupied by the sanctuary of City II, considered to have been sacred to the same god, although without absolute proof. However, there was such a complete change in the organisation of the temple, with a shift in the placement of the Very Holy Place, that it may be asked whether the same divinity was worshipped here. The identification is this time confirmed

by the discovery of five foundation deposits that carry the inscription “Nûr-Mer, the vice-king of Mari, built the temple of Ninhursag” (*IRSA* 1971).

The building is very squat in shape, about 13–15 m each side including the walls; it contains a small hall 8 m by 7 m and a little lateral annexe on the north-west side. A porch, 2.5 m wide and framed by two abutments that provide a depth of 2 m, is situated in the middle of the southern façade and gives direct access to the large interior hall. On the outside, an open space extends widely in front of the building; two stone bases, in the line of the abutments and placed halfway to the southern wall, could have served to support a protective roof, either in a prolongation of the porch – suggested by a floor paved with slabs –, or reaching from the southern wall, against which a small platform backs. Annexes appear to extend to the north-west, but their organisation is not very clear.

A sanctuary whose shape is unusual in Mesopotamia, it is similar to the temple of the Massif Rouge of City II and it has its place in the category of the temple-towers of the Syrian world. Its massiveness necessitated solid foundations, which extend to a depth of 2 m, and were first thought to belong to an earlier phase. The religious installations of such a temple are not known, as the ritual practices took place on the terrace, in the open air.

What is striking here is that not only has the nature of the temple changed, which implies an exceptional theological mutation – the change from a horizontal temple where man and divinity faced each other to a vertical building where man faced the immensity of creation – but also that

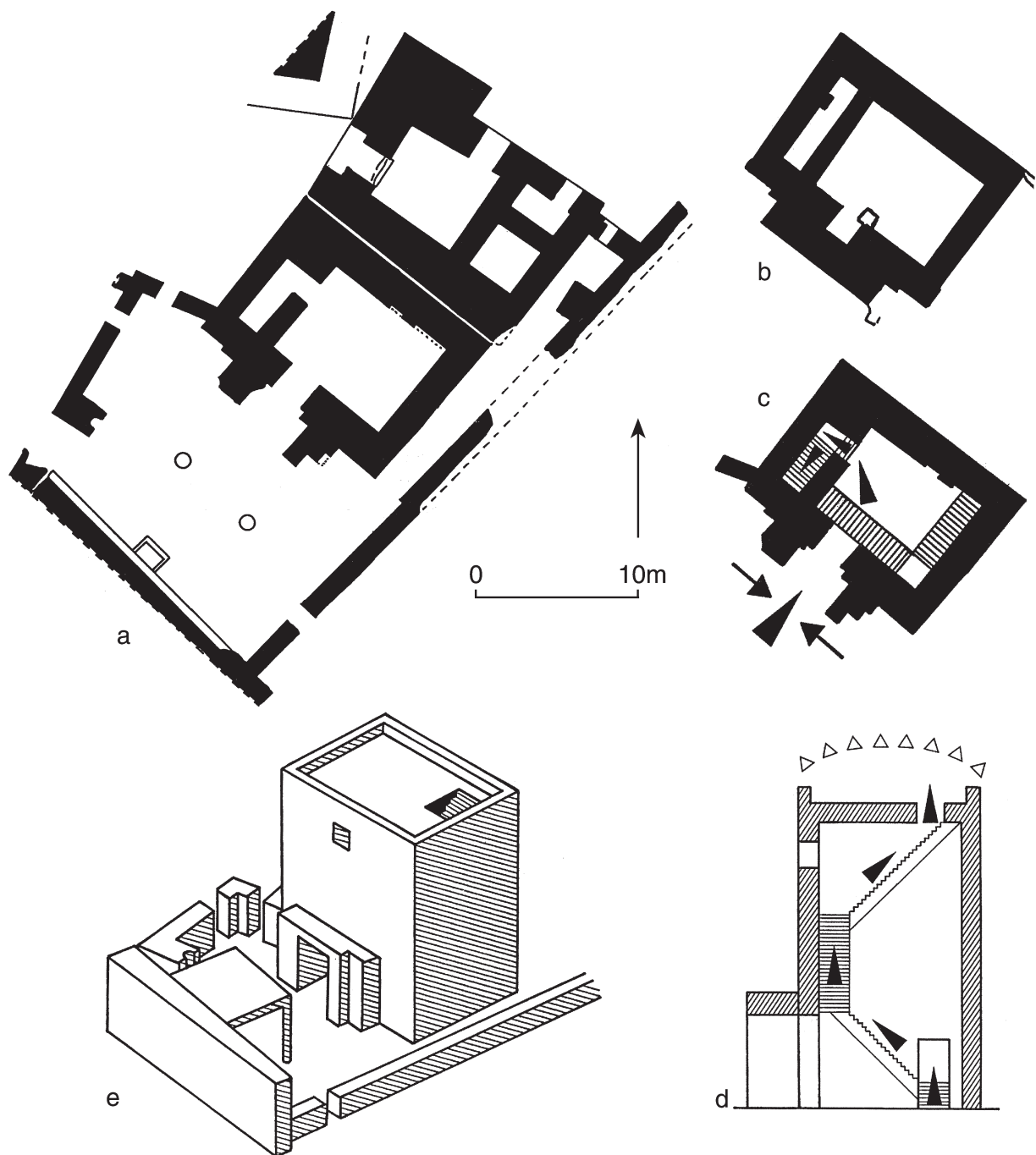


Figure 96: Plan and reconstruction of the temple-tower of Ninhursag.

between City II and City III the position of the Very Holy Place was shifted by ten to fifteen metres.

### ***The Ishtar chapel of the palace***

Among the innovations of City III was the integration, during the construction of the Great Royal Palace, of an Ishtar chapel, known as the “chapel of the paintings” (Space 132), while the Sacred Precinct was preserved; the reasons

for adding a new place of worship, which is always unusual in the palaces, are not well understood.

### **Development of foundation rites from City II to City III**

The origin of the foundation rites is not well understood. At Mari, although nothing is known for City I, these rites





Figure 97: Circular model under the floor of the Street of the Model (City II).



Figure 98: Foundation nail, City II, temple of Ninhursag.

were regularly practised in City II and took two different forms, one of which is found in City III.

The first and most unexpected concerns the burial, clearly at the time of the re-foundation of the city, of five circular models under the original level of a street and three dwellings (fig. 97). These models were filled with almost identical miniature pottery series, and suggest by their

round shape the plan of the city and by their organisation a dwelling.

The second practice, the most well-known, consists of placing objects having symbolic significance in the foundations of religious buildings, which after purification rites consecrate the territory designated for the temple to the divinity. In the middle of the third millennium in







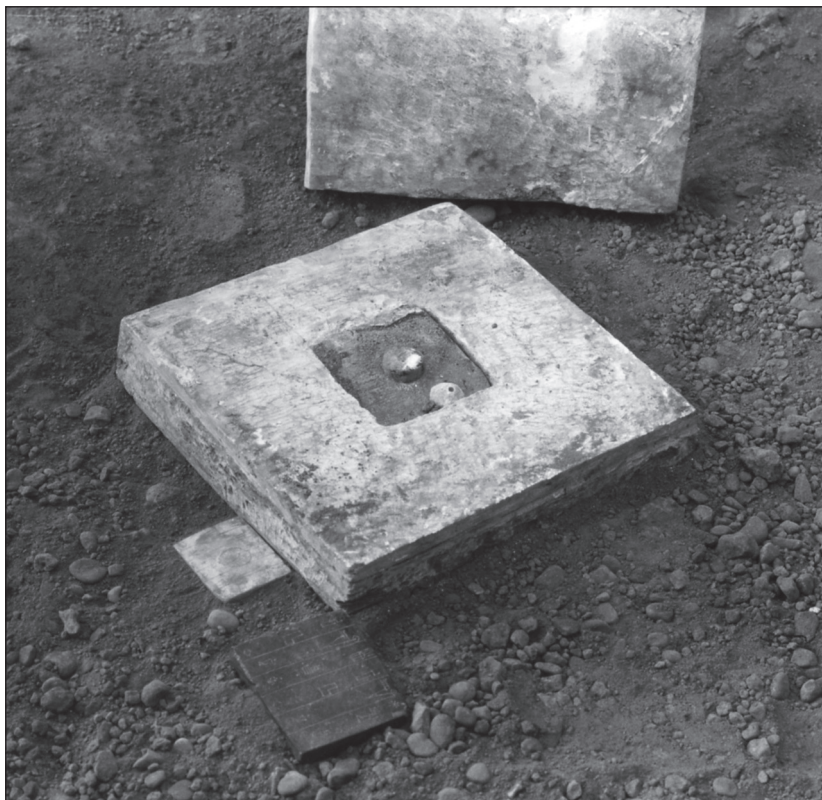


Figure 101: Foundation nail of the temple of Lions (City III, Shakkanakku period).

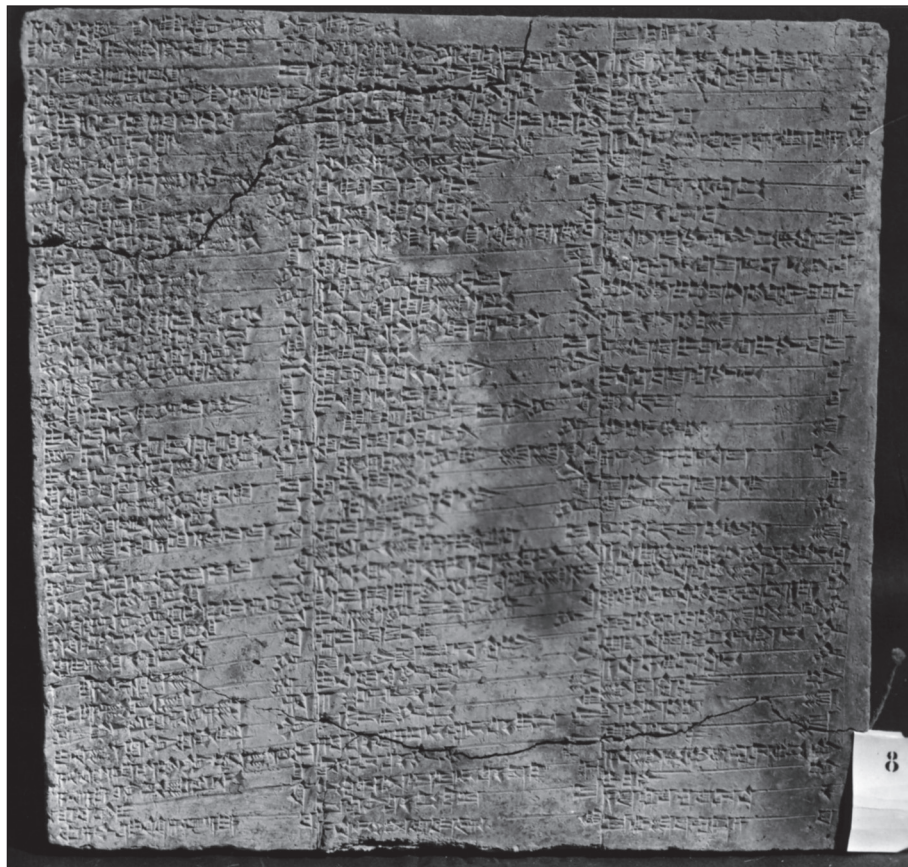


Figure 102: Inscribed foundation brick of Iahdun-Lim in the temple of Shamash (City III, Amorite period).

temple of Shamash, and in this development, the period of the *Shakkanaku* appears to have been a transition stage between the symbolic, even magic, value of the nail and the existential meaning of the texts, which was to become sufficient in itself three centuries later.

### **Conclusion: the originality of the sacred architecture at Mari**

Shortly after the discovery of Mari, the tendency was to view the city as the beacon of Mesopotamia radiating light towards a backward Occident that had not attained the summit of urban civilisation. This position is deeply flawed by a Mesopotamo-centrism that is perhaps understandable for the first half of the twentieth century, but must be abandoned in favour of a view that takes into account the specific forces that were present in the larger regional units.

If we examine the morphology of the temples of City II, it is the absolute independence of the choices made at Mari in relation to Mesopotamia that is striking; none of the examples discovered are actually comparable to any Mesopotamian monument of the third millennium.

Of the religious installations, the many boat-shaped libation receptacles and their locations appear to be highly representative of a religious culture that is particular to Mari, and few comparisons are possible. This is why the appearance of platforms that were separate or built up against walls instead of low podiums and libation tables suggest a sudden intrusion of this Mesopotamian practice during the history of the second city; would this have been the consequence of the arrival of the Akkadians at Mari?

On the other hand, although the Syrian religious universe

of the third millennium is still poorly understood, the influence from the lands of the Levant appears to have been much stronger. The idea for the temple-tower of the Massif Rouge probably came from the Levant, as well as that of the “betyl” or sacred stone in the temple of Ninnizaza (figs. 81, 87). Furthermore, the influence from Syria was particularly strong in the religious architecture of the *Shakkanakku* period.

None of the temples found in City III present a morphology that is Babylonian or Sumerian; the only origin that we can observe is Syrian or northern. For the temple-tower and the High Terrace, the influence was from western Syria, while the elongated form of the temple of Lions came from the foothills of the Taurus, and the temple with incorporated terrace (such as that of Shamash) would appear to have originated in Assyria, although further information is necessary to confirm this.

It is thus the entire northern geographical band, from the Zagros to the Mediterranean, that concerns Mari in the religious domain. Certainly, the morphology of the temples should not be confused with the content of the religion; religious thought at Mari is considered to be of Mesopotamian origin. But it is probably a vision oriented by the official theologies that gives this impression. The rites are still poorly known and their origin obscure; the rituals provide only evidence of the practices but not the reasons for them.

The religious universe of Mari appears in the eighteenth century to have been faithful to its own traditions, with a particularly strong root in the northern Syro-Mesopotamian domain, which confers an exceptional originality in comparison to all its neighbours.



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## VII. The palaces

### **The palace-sanctuary of City II**

The exploration of this monument, which began in 1964, is still incomplete and none of the phases defined by the excavation are completely understood. However, the information recovered does shed light on the main aspects of its history and some of its principal characteristics.

Constructed at the time of the foundation of City II, following the levelling and terracing that marked the reoccupation of the site, it was built in a location that had not been occupied by a palace at the time of City I.

### ***The earliest phase, P-3 (figs. 103, 104)***

The different trenches dug in the central space of the Sacred Precinct (Space 26), in Space 4 and at the location of the door of the palace, revealed the oldest level of the building, whose walls are for the most part the same as those of the following phases; only the wall coating marks the break between levels. It is thus possible to reconstruct the plan of the palace for the first period of its existence everywhere that the later phases are known.

These similarities in plan of all the phases suggest that the building was extended towards the end of its existence, and that the western edge coincides with that of the second millennium palace. But without systematic excavation this can only be considered a probability.

The foundations appear at the base of the layer of wall coating; they do not exceed four or five courses at this place, which is very little for such a massive wall. However, their stability appears to be remarkable as, although the courses are not perfectly horizontal, the slight subsidence observed has caused no weakness in the wall.

Space 4, with a fairly large surface area (14 m by 14 m) was provided with walkways in bitumen, resurfaced several times, which served the main entrances.

The door, discovered on the north face of the palace,

was constructed in this first phase; its base level lay directly on the last layer of City I. What is striking is its monumental character, quite exceptional and greatly superior to that of the palace at Kish (palace P or plano-convex palace) of the same period (Early Dynastic III), or that of the oval temple at Khafadjé, which is only half the size of the door of the palace of Mari. It was apparently constructed according to the principle of pincer-gates that could provide defensive security through a series of vestibules, but here the principle was adapted to also organise circulation.

The floor covering at the location of the door was particularly carefully made, paved with perfectly joined fired tiles laid upon a layer of fine sand; above this a very dense layer of bitumen several centimetres thick was spread; on this layer in some places plaques of plaster remained, signs of a very worn level.

There were no indications of fire or destruction and no object on the floor; there is no explanation for why this first level was abandoned in favour of raising the floor 70 cm with a reapplication of coatings.

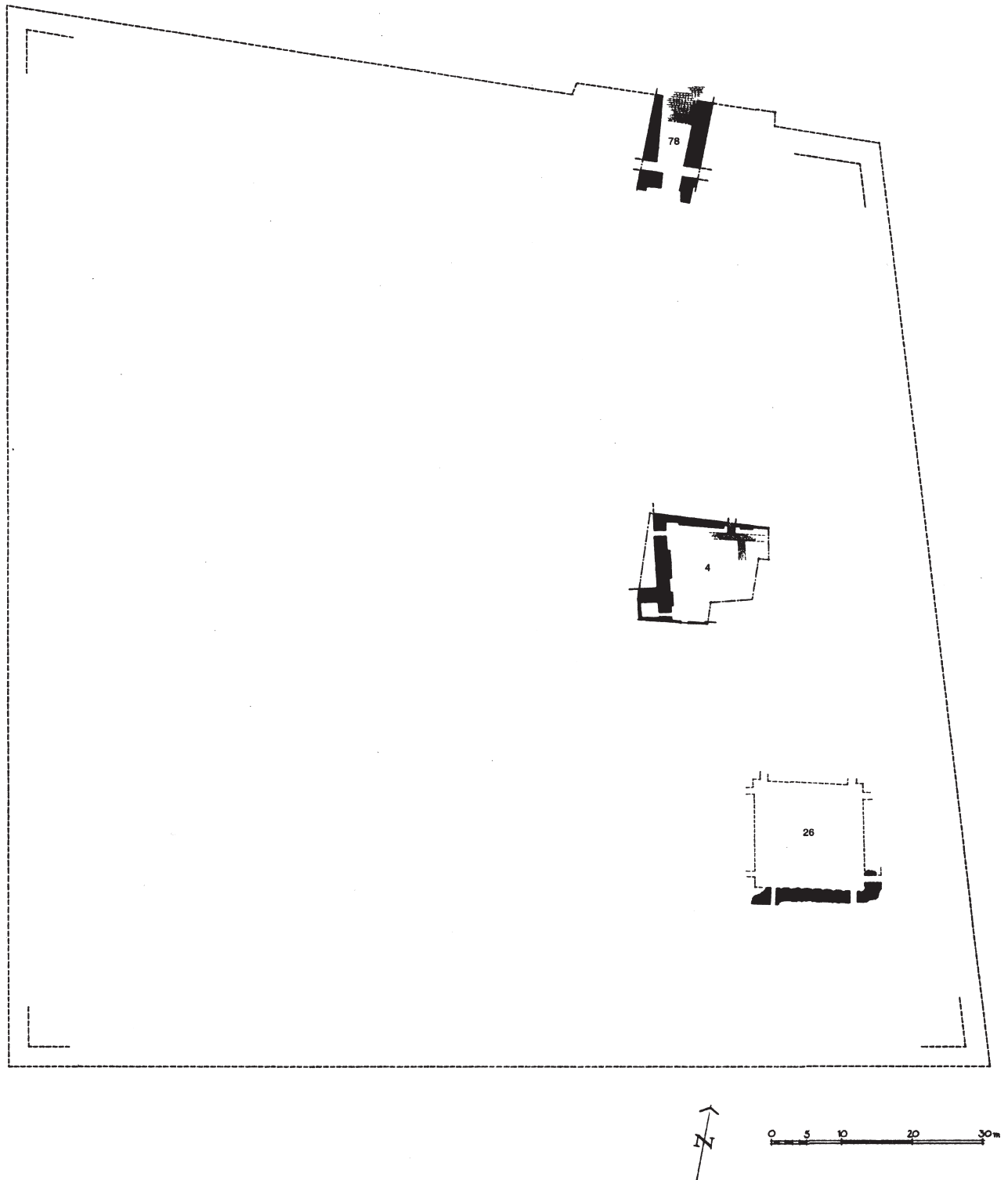
However, it is certain that the plan of the palace was established at the time of the first phase, with the general characteristics that are now known.

### ***Palace P-2 and the Sacred Precinct (fig. 105)***

Three sectors of this phase are known: the entrance door (fig. 106), Space 4 and the Sacred Precinct (fig. 107).

The door had undergone no changes since P-3. Space 4, having the same dimensions as in P-3, also possessed walkways covered with bitumen, but these sometimes followed different paths.

The Sacred Precinct is the strong point of the monument, and from this level P-2 onward its religious nature is evident. But because of insufficient excavation it is an



*Figure 103: The palace of City II: level P-3.*

isolated, independent island, and it is P-1 that indicates its insertion into the complete monument with a main access from the northern rooms 14 and 16.

The principle of its organisation is simple: a slightly lozenge-shaped central space measuring 16 m per side was enclosed by a circle of rooms, the whole forming a more

or less rectangular block measuring 31–32 m by 37 m, this surrounded on its four sides by a corridor 2 m wide, segmented by double pilasters.

This organisation conforms to the tripartite division of all Near Eastern temples with an entrance (14–16), a Holy Place occupied by the central space (26–27) and a



Figure 104: The first level (P-3) in the Sacred Precinct of the palace of City II.

Very Holy Place (45–46) on the southern side formed by a monumental hall ( $22 \times 7$  m), which at its eastern end opens onto a small room through a porch with a double rabbet.

All the walls of the central space, a hub for interior and peripheral circulation, were decorated with a particularly fine series of niches having two protrusions. Certain doors were equipped with what appear to have been wooden thresholds and removable systems for closing.

The floors were often of tamped earth, sometimes in plaster, and in the central space certain paths of circulation were very carefully made; three straight walkways, made of two courses of fired bricks covered with bitumen, linked the doors placed opposite each other in the angles. Only the southern part was not equipped with these.

The excavation revealed the presence of strange masses of mud bricks applied against certain walls, for example those that separate rooms 16 and 17 from Space 26, and Space 26 from room 46 in its western part as well as the south-east angle of 46. This would appear to have been a consolidation of certain walls that were probably affected by a dramatic event (an earthquake?), in anticipation of the rebuilding of the upper part of the walls and the embedding of their bases in an operation to deliberately raise the floors, an operation that indicates the beginning of phase P-1.

Religious installations in the Holy Place were discovered in the area circumscribed by the walkways covered with bitumen in the central space: three stone slabs in limestone or onyx, juxtaposed and provided in the middle of the north side with an intentional outflow towards a small buried recipient in plaster or bronze and three fine bronze jars, embedded in the floor. All these installations were certainly intended to receive the substance of the libations offered to the divinity. Impressions of rectangular objects set in a west-east orientation possibly indicate the location of tables for offerings that may have been movable. Basins

of different sizes were also found: one in the north-west angle, the other being more impressive, placed at about the same distance between the western walkway and the wall. Finally, six recesses for fitting poles that probably carried religious symbols, objects, representations or banners, were discovered near the northern wall, and four at the edge of the walkway coated with bitumen and thus almost against the wall, and two in the walkway itself.

The discovery, in the coatings and floors of room 45, of beads and fragments of lapis-lazuli, gold and gold leaf, although not at all visible, indicate that this was a “resplendent house”, worthy of the divinity that occupied it. Furthermore, in room 46, long gypsum slabs laid perpendicular to the wall were in association with two chests containing beads in semi-precious stones and fragments of gold leaf.

The reasons for the end of this phase P-2 remain completely conjectural. There was no evidence of violent destruction or fire, or any objects on the floor. However, there were walls that had been partially raised with blocks of gypsum and buttressed by large amounts of mud bricks; there was a coating of very good quality decorated with niches having two projections which stopped where the floor of P-1 began, and there were bitumen-covered walkways that had been remade at least once, indicating that this level had been used for some time, a period that was perhaps different from that of the wall coatings.

A technical accident was perhaps responsible for this event, as the roof appears to have been an architectonic feat at the limit of the possible. Could a collapse of this covering been the price paid for daring to approach this limit? To transform a span of 12 m to a span of 16 m, even with an intermediate support, is possibly an indication that the limit had been passed. But another explanation appears to be more satisfactory, as an earthquake could



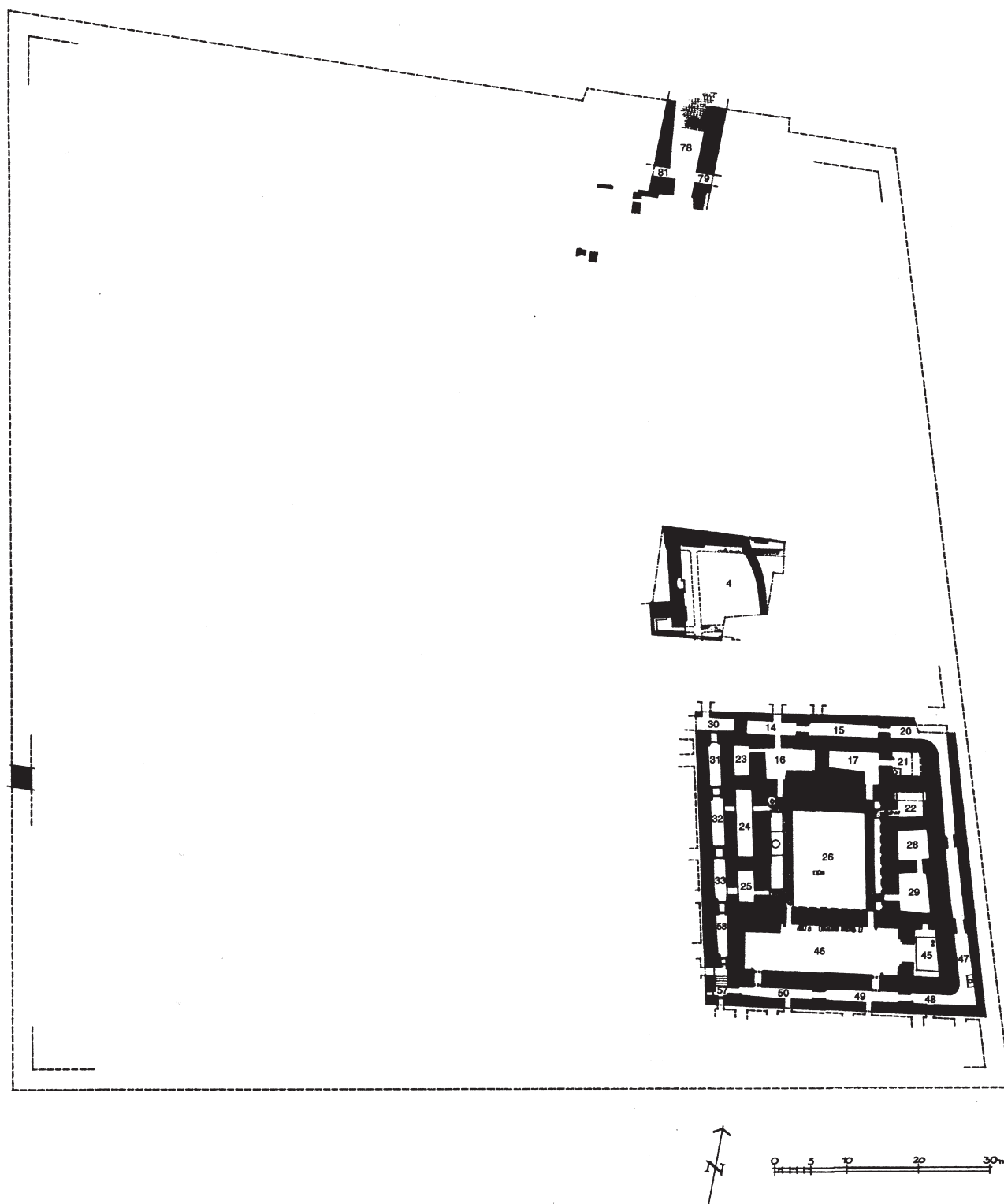


Figure 105: The palace of City II: level P-2.

also have been responsible. Several indications point in this direction: the fact that the internal mass of certain walls was damaged and repaired with stones, that buttresses were built against both sides of certain weakened walls, that only the east-west walls appear to have been affected,

as though there had been a shock wave progressing from north to south. This indicates that there may have been at least one earthquake during the time of City I, and that the region crossed by the Euphrates in Syria lies in a zone vulnerable to such an event.



Figure 106: Gate of the palace of City II.



Figure 107: Central space of the Sacred Precinct of palace P-2 of City II.

It is difficult to evaluate the time period passed before the restoration was undertaken; but once the decision was made, the reconstruction began by repair of the damage, consolidation of the walls, construction of buttresses, and once this was achieved, the floor was raised to the level of the highest repairs carried out, more than 2 m. The new floor thus represented the floor of P-1. It is almost certain that during the same operation it would have been necessary to raise the top of the walls and the roof by about 2 or 3 m.

### ***Palace P-1 (fig. 108)***

Access to this level was facilitated by its proximity to the

surface; the surface area cleared is now four or five times larger than that of P-2.

The door is almost identical, although the second tenaille was narrowed by 1.10 m (opening reduced to 2.40 m) and the level of use, in highly tamped earth without paving or bitumen this time, was raised about 75 cm.

The northern quarter extended between the door and the Sacred Precinct. Large building works in the second millennium palace erased part of the sector. Towards the west extend the large rooms where artisanal activities appear to have been important. Towards the south, Space 4 appears to structure all of this quarter, except for its western end. Vestibule 5 ensures liaison with the sector that



Figure 108: The palace of City II: level P-1.

leads to the door and with the 3-2-1 group. To the west of Space 4, a door gave access to 64, a little row of rooms that ran along the courtyard, and from there, to corridor 63, narrow and running north-south.

The dimensions of Space 4 (18 m by 16 m) suggest that it was open to the sky; but the excavator found a large mass

of carbonised beams that could not have been a simple porch roof around the courtyard but rather a proper roof, in spite of the width of 16 m, found also for the central space (Space 26) and for room 3.

The material recovered includes an important group of flint (in room 3), broken vessels and a few tablets in the



collapse. Finally, the skeleton of a man lay on the floor of room 5, with no indication of burial.

The general outline of the Sacred Precinct had not been modified since level 2; the plan remained exactly the same.

Major changes occurred concerning the installations: a large altar (fig. 88) decorated with projections and equipped with long plaster boat-shaped libation receptacles at its base replaced the slabs and libation vessels of the Holy Place, and in the location of the Very Holy Place was found a podium backed against a wall, with a little side stairway.

Particularly striking is the difference in quality of the architectural treatment between phases P-2 and P-1. The refined decoration with double projections and the bitumen-covered walkways are gone, replaced by an earth floor, a coarse wall coating with clear wear traces and walls without decoration.

The quarter to the west of the Sacred Precinct forms an architectural group associating two formulas: in the north a unit conceived according to the principle of the central space (11 m per side) encircled by a series of rooms, and to the south, through doubled security doorway 38, another unit is reached, smaller in size, also organised around a central space. Two doors ensured passage to the eastern corridor. Although the architecture is identical to that of the Sacred Precinct, here no sacred character is attached. The thickness of the walls suggests the existence of an upper storey.

The southern unit south of the Sacred Precinct, which marks the southern edge of the palace, is unusual as it is long (40 m by 11 m); from the corridor four doors give access to a series of rooms or small apartments of two or three rooms equipped with domestic installations (benches, hearths). A stairway in 56 (some ten steps preserved) provides evidence for the existence of an upper storey, also indicated by the remains of a mosaic panel found “in the middle of ashes and broken pottery” in the collapse of the southern corridor, not on the floor.

The area under the throne room of the palace of City III, brought to light in a trench, is probably a sector of artisanal activities, indicated by various traces of fire on the floors, the presence of pits and the layout of locus 72 where water played an important role (bitumen coating, and against the eastern wall, a bench equipped with an outflow to a drainage pit).

This time, the reasons for the end of phase P-1 are clear: a fire that was apparently general, although its intensity was not the same everywhere, which left large amounts of debris each time the floors were covered with earth and not cleaned when restoration was carried out. But who was responsible for this destruction, which Akkadian king – Sargon or Naram-Sin?

### ***Palace P-0 (fig. 109)***

Shortly after the fire, the palace was restored, usually by raising the floors on the debris left by the fire and by covering the walls with a new coating; but three major

transformations affected the plan of P-1, perhaps in those places where the destruction was considered to be irreversible but perhaps also to satisfy the new masters on essential points:

- the reconstruction of the Sacred Precinct,
- the structural restoration of Space 4,
- the construction of the Hall of the Pillars (figs. 110, 111)

The Sacred Precinct, considerably damaged and probably considered profaned, had to be reconstructed and re-consecrated. Keeping the original plan was imperative, except for a few small variations in the thickness of the walls, and it was not even judged necessary to reconstruct the northern part, which was simply reattached to the new construction. Four modifications were carried out:

1. The west, south and east façades were provided with a very regular series of projections or salients, but no decoration was applied to the interior sides of the central space except for two large niches in the southern wall.
2. The Sacred Precinct was now practically closed; normal circulation continued to take place from room 12 and there was only one door in the south wall of 46, which permitted roundabout access to the Very Holy Place.
3. The religious installations were modified: in the Holy Place the offering table, now decorated with very regular salients, was no longer situated in open space but backed against a wall; in the Very Holy Place, a new podium backed against a wall, identically decorated and equipped with two lateral stairways, replaced that of P-1.
4. The insertion of two quite imposing pillars (about 3 m by 1.5 m) in the central space is a very important modification, because it indicates a profound structural transformation. The span across the central space changed from  $16 \times 16$  to  $12 \times 16$  m, the same span that the Mesopotamians knew how to use for some ten centuries without an intermediary support. This return to the old span indicates that the new technique, although viable, was rejected perhaps because it was not entirely satisfactory.

The so-called “Treasure of Ur”, found at the foot of the eastern pillar that is the most characteristic architectural innovation of this phase, certainly represents the deposit related to the re-foundation of the sanctuary.

In its P-0 version, the Sacred Precinct is very sober, but also possessed of apparently new qualities of clarity and precision; the principle of symmetry is at this level much more used than before. Should a foreign influence be seen here?

The reconstruction of Space 4 (figs. 112, 113) included the construction of three double pillars intended to support the roof, which divided the space into two equal parts, each spanning 8 m. Thus here too the span of 16 m was



*Figure 109: The palace of City II: level P-0*

drastically reduced, without affecting the grandeur of the hall, by reorganisation of the structural supports. The use of double pillars came from the necessity of creating a recessed angle on the terrace to admit enough light to illuminate this interior hall.

The Hall of the Pillars with its western side is the only really new room endowed during the reconstruction with totally original features (figs. 109, 111).

In the form of a trapezoid, perhaps necessitated by the space available, the interior hall measures nearly 16 m in its longest dimensions. The access is at the south face near the south-west angle and another door at the other end opens onto an annexe behind. Five niches with double projections punctuate the façade, while simple pilasters are regularly spaced on the exterior of the west wall. Against the wall, west of the entrance, a kind of seat made of mud



Figure 110: One of the pillars of the Building of Pillars of level P-0 of the palace of City II.

bricks was found. By the insertion of two rows of three large pillars, the interior space was divided into three bays of unequal width, creating a central nave 6 m wide with two side aisles 3 m wide. At the north end of the central nave a low podium covered with plaster and set against the wall formed a kind of dais.

This assemblage suggests the idea of pomp and ceremony and the possibility that this was the throne room. Most striking is the novelty of this architectural choice, for which no previous reference can be proposed. The makers of this Hall of Pillars and the Sacred Precinct of P-0 introduced new concepts at Mari, perhaps related to a foreign influence, which in this case would have been the dominant Akkadian power, rather than to an internal development.

There is no evidence to indicate the duration of use of P-0, nor the conditions under which it went out of use. There is no trace of fire, no particular destruction, no object abandoned. There is some evidence of wear, particularly on the plastered installations, but at the point at which activity in the palace stopped, it was emptied of its material, except for groups of pottery and the occasional



Figure 111: Volumetric reconstruction of the Hall of Pillars of level P-0.



jar. The abandonment was probably voluntary, and was immediately followed by filling-in, in order to construct a new building of which some traces have been found. Thus ended the life of this prodigious palace, built at the time of the foundation of the second city.

### ***Architectural features***

The palace of City II is distinguished by certain striking architectural features that provide much information on the aptitudes, originality and creativity of the architects who designed it in the middle of the third millennium.

#### **Autonomous units skilfully articulated**

Although the general outline of the palace remains unknown, it is clear that it was founded on the principle of juxtaposition of structurally independent units. The module with a “central space” is the most frequently used, but there are also “linear” units and even the tripartite plan. The different units are skilfully articulated by corridors that served for human circulation as well as for the penetration of light from the periphery. The central space was illuminated by clerestories.

#### **Relation to the upper storey in P-1/P-0**

The indications for the existence of an upper storey are few, but are quite clear: the stairway in 46, the fragments of mosaic panel scattered between 52 and the adjoining rooms among large potsherds, and the thickness of the walls, especially between the western corridor and the junction corridor in the interior of the western section. However, the incompleteness of the excavation does not permit the establishment of an exact plan of the upper storey.

### **Technical features**

Particularly significant are:

- the dimensions of certain rooms (central space of the Sacred Precinct, Space 4...) include a span of 16 m and thus indicate in comparison to the end of the fourth millennium an increase in span of 30% without intermediate pillars.
- pillars, which appeared in P-0 in this architecture as a base element of the system set in place, and apparently preferred for these spaces with a 16 m span but also for those with lesser spans that pertained to the formula without intermediary pillars; this use of the pillar was not really a novelty, as it seemed to have been in common usage for religious architecture.
- The double posts of Space 4 demonstrate an original solution for covering the space as well as allowing light to enter by means of a recessed angle of the terrace following the median line, which implies a height under the ceiling that differed in the north and south parts of the hall.

A good number of the architectural characteristics of the palace at Mari are found in the Mesopotamian palaces of Early Dynastic III: units with roofed central spaces, linear units, corridors providing for circulation at ground level as well as in the upper storey, provision for air and light to penetrate, are found in the palaces at Kish A, Kish P, Eridu and Tell Asmar. Mari is thus not an exception in architectural design, but perfectly representative of its era.

### ***The presence of a sanctuary, workshops and a throne room***

The sequence of the palaces of the middle of the third millennium is characterised by two factors that are not clearly understood:

- on the one hand, the central space of the Sacred Precinct and group 46–45 present clearly religious characteristics, indicated by the fixed installations.
- on the other hand, phases P-3, P-2 and P-0 have produced hardly any objects on the floors, and so may be analysed only through the architecture.

It would thus appear difficult to confirm whether this is a palace or a temple, the latter representing the simplest solution. However, certain major features do lead towards an overall interpretation that appears probable:

- the presence of a permanent sanctuary is certain in P-2 as well as P-3, each phase of the Sacred Precinct containing evidence of sacred character: libation tables, the three large bronze vessels in level P-2, an “altar” with projections and boat-shaped libation receptacles in phase P-1, an altar in phase P-0, the various podiums in the Very Holy Place.
- for the workshops in palace P-1, although the purpose of some of them could not be defined, it is certain that they existed starting in P-2; the engraving of mother-of-pearl and shells is indicated in particular by the flint tools found, which were knapped in several workshops (particularly in P-1), as well as by elements of mosaics awaiting assemblage (in P-2) and by installations for evacuating waste water associated with artisanal work. Three workshops were found in different locations in palace P-1, each time closely associated with waste from working beads or other small objects or with tool waste. It appears that manufacturing activity in this palace was very important.
- the presence of a throne room in P-0; a function of representation appears to belong to the pillared room constructed during this last phase, the predecessor that it replaced being unknown as the whole of the building remained the same. The royal function appears to be a logical factor in this construction.

Recognition that the building as a whole is a palace appears to be coherent, but a sanctuary is also there, monumental and incontestable, the most imposing of those found so far at Mari, although we do not know the name

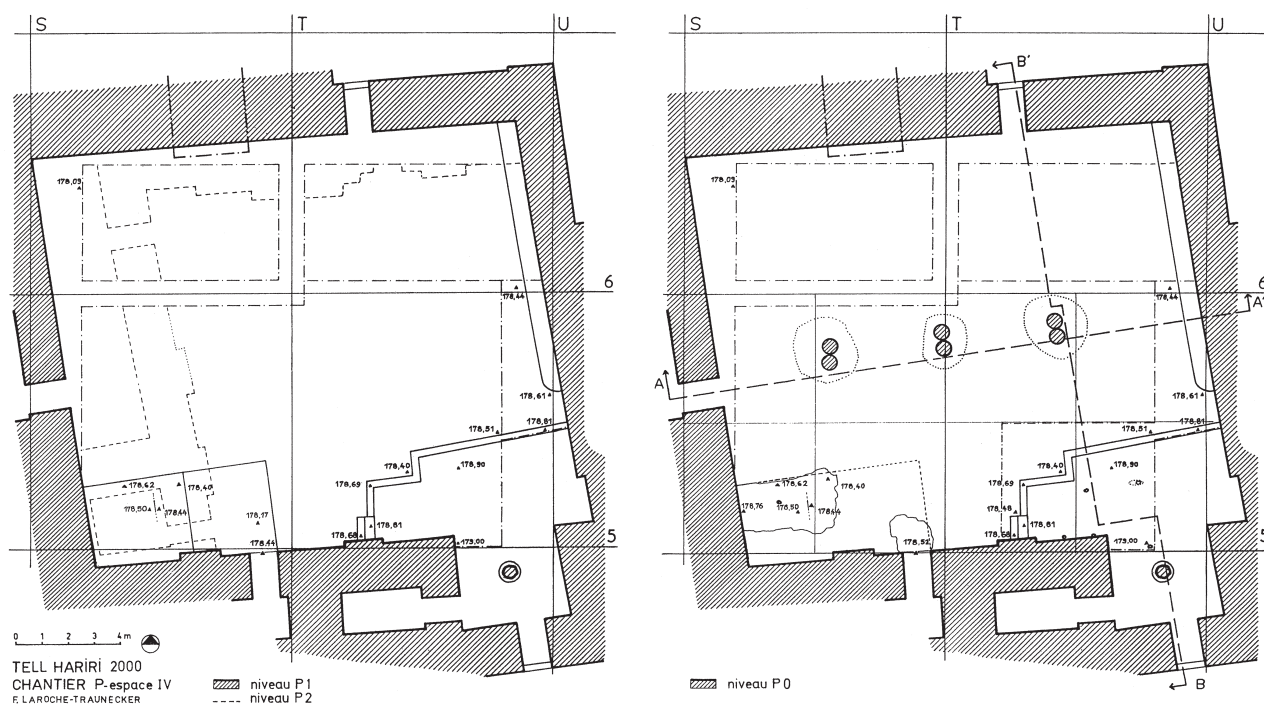


Figure 112: Space 4: level P-2/P-1 and level P-0 with its pillars.

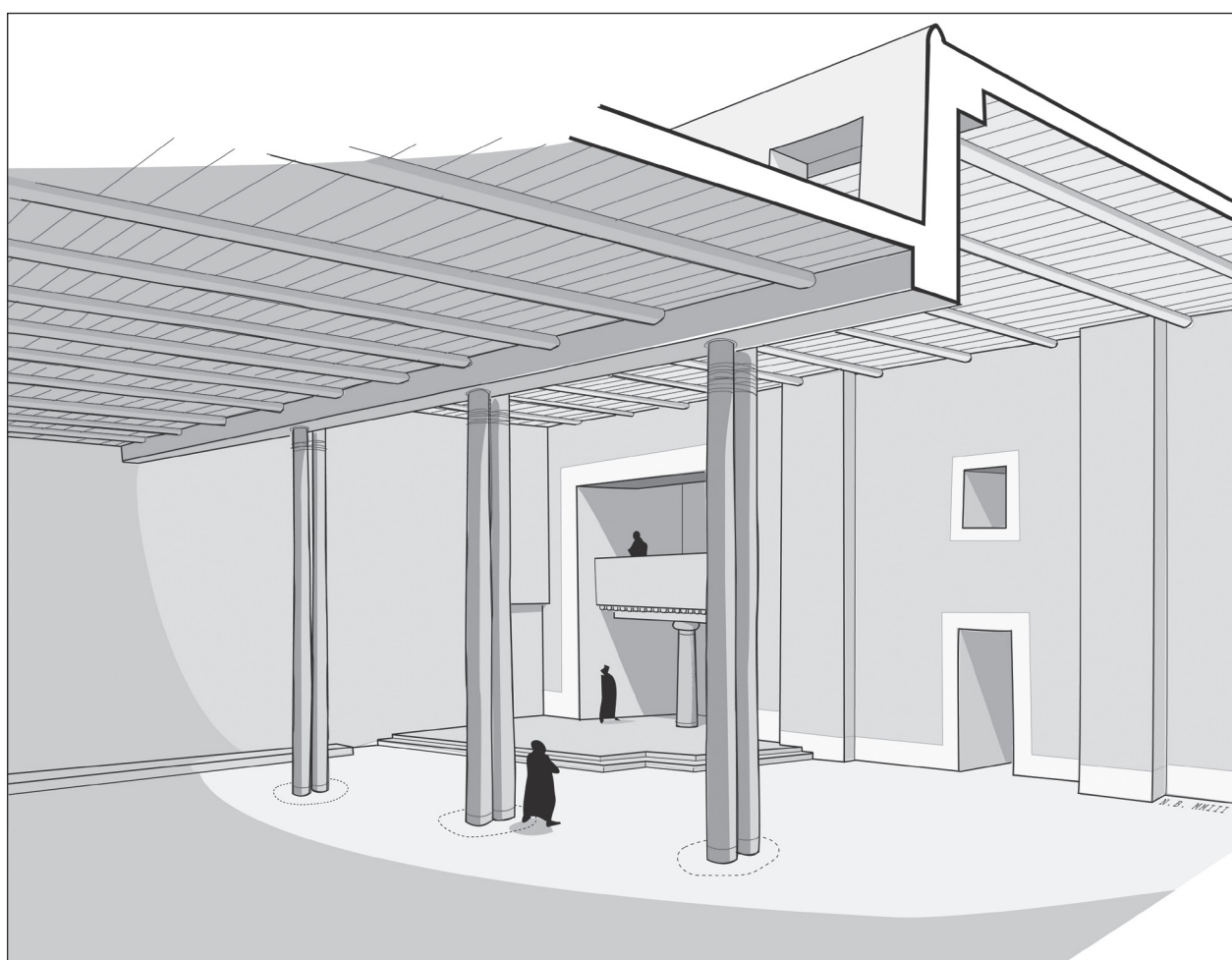


Figure 113: Volumetric reconstruction of Space 4 at level P-0.

of the divinity worshipped. And in this vast construction artisanal activities that were probably religious in nature were present.

So, was this a sanctuary, a palace, a temple-palace or a workshop-palace? Or was it a temple-factory harbouring an administrative power? It does not appear to fit into a clear-cut definition.

### ***The history of the building***

Thus by an accumulation of observations and indications – the stratigraphy of the floors and that of the architecture – the history of the palace, which merges with that of City II, can be presented according to the following outline:

Its construction took place at the time of the foundation of City II in the Early Dynastic III period; the builders levelled the surface that was eroded following the abandonment of City I, and established a kind of highly tamped terrace in such a way that the lightweight foundations, four to five courses, were enough. It was on this infrastructure, undifferentiated from the wall itself, that the building was constructed.

Phase P-3 is the oldest phase and certainly existed, as demonstrated by the base of the wall and its coating as well as the level studied in Space 4 and at the door, but nothing can be stated about it; known only is that the inhabitants of the palace, for unknown reasons, decided to raise the level of the floor by about 70 cm and to remake the coating starting from that point. But why have no religious installations been found in this level?

Level P-2 is the level in which the religious installations were the most carefully made, with floor slabs, libation vessels, basins and walkways covered with bitumen. But it is also a phase that ends with an event (accidental collapse of the sector of the Sacred Precinct and its surroundings, or an earthquake) which, although it left hardly any direct trace, led to the decision to consolidate the masonry, to make a foundation and to raise the floor by about 2.50 m. It is probable that this raising was carried out for the whole of the building and that the walls were raised by the same amount, as this is a difference of some 3 m of height from the foundation level of the palace.

The architecture of P-1 was not as carefully executed as that of P-2, but this may be a sign of a fairly long occupation. It was destruction by fire that affected, in different degrees, all of the building and ended this third stage. Should this fire be attributed to Sargon or to Naram-Sin? No argument in favour of one or the other has been defined until recently; the latest discoveries have enabled clarification of the context of this fire and its most probable attribution to Naram-Sin.

Rapidly after the disastrous event, it appears, restoration was undertaken with a curious mixture of patching-up and careful creation; next to the Hall of Pillars, Space 4 and the Sacred Precinct, which were artfully constructed, the renovators recoated the walls without removing the remains of the burned coating and covered the burned

debris on the floors with a layer of earth that created the new level of use. This was also the moment chosen by the architects to abandon the 16-metre span and return to the more traditional and secure 12-metre span. In order to not modify the structure of the whole temple, the builders simply introduced a pair of pillars 2 metres from the northern face. Was this return to the norm due to foreign architects at Mari who felt no allegiance to the innovation of the founders of the palace? Perhaps, but it must be kept in mind that the same value of 12 metres appears in other central spaces of the same period and particularly in the palaces of Kish.

No evidence for the end of Phase P-0 has been discovered; most of the floors were clean, practically without material and without any traces of fire. The impression is that of voluntary abandonment with a general filling-in, followed by reconstruction. Some traces of the latter were found in various places in the palace (beneath the throne room of the second millennium palace and near the door), but the great works of the *Shakkanakku* reduced them to practically nothing.

### ***Conclusion: the palace of Mari II, an exceptional monument?***

Is the palace of City II a unique monument in the annals of Mesopotamia, or only an entity among others in a series? In fact, it is both unique and belongs to its time.

It belongs to its time, manifested by the nature and the free combination of the basic architectural formulas that are found everywhere else, by the skilful combination of these to create a monument that resembles no other, by a remarkable capacity, common to all the constructions of this period, to make the ground floor and the upper storey complementary, to judiciously juxtapose enormous empty volumes next to structures with storeys that were places of everyday life. In the palace of City II, aeration, light and circulation were well thought out, and basic modules, such as the value of 16 m, were employed to structure all the components of a unit.

It is unique in its general dimensions, which have not so far been found elsewhere, by the monumental nature of its door, twice the usual norm, by the recurrent use of the value of 16 m to define the large interior spaces, and by the quality and refinement of the architectural creation of its Sacred Precinct.

It is also unique in its exceptional state of preservation, thanks to which it has been possible to enrich our knowledge of Mesopotamian architecture of the mid-third millennium. But this only characterises its stature as archaeological evidence, and does not set it apart as a palace of the third millennium.

Its uniqueness lies in that it appears to have been dominated by the association of the sacred and the profane, because the god of the city and his king seem to have inhabited the same precinct, although each occupied one or more independent buildings. The only known example



of a temple-palace or temple-factory for this period, it is an exception that is difficult to interpret, as the archaeological evidence can only be fully defined as part of a series and is not easily understandable from the angle of a unique case.

### **The phantom palace (beginning of City III)**

Although it is difficult to establish the actual duration of the existence of palace P-0, which was probably short, it is certain that it was replaced, at the very beginning of City III, by a building of which there remain very few vestiges: elements of foundations, hinge sockets, fragments of underground conduits, three pillar bases (foundations) belonging to a portico, that is, elements always situated beneath floors which have disappeared.

It is clearly the construction of the Great Royal Palace of the *Shakkanakku* period that brought about the near-destruction of this palace, which is now no more than a phantom of its former self because the builders of City III decided to maintain the level of the city, and thus that of the new palace, slightly below the floors of this phantom palace, which they voluntarily destroyed.

Probably constructed by a successor of Ididish (Shu-Dagan or Ishme-Dagan), it could have disappeared in the period of Hanun-Dagan, the probable builder of the Great Royal Palace. This palace would have functioned for between a century and a half and two centuries.

There is thus no hope of finding the plan of this building.

### **The Great Royal Palace of City III (fig. 114)**

A major monument of City III, it is the best known of the palaces of the period of the Amorite dynasties; it is also and perhaps above all the palace that exemplifies the fundamental architectural features of the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia, the functions of the palaces and the way of life of their occupants.

Roughly rectangular in form, it measures about 180 m from north to south and 130 m from east to west without the eastern extension. The surface area on the ground is close to 2.3 ha. With these dimensions, the palace of Mari is not the most imposing of the Near Eastern palaces; although it is larger than the palaces of the third and beginning of the second millennium, it is smaller than the palaces at Aqar Quf or the Neo-Assyrian capitals.

### **The long existence of the Great Royal Palace**

After the excavation of the palace and its archives, it appeared evident that the building brought to light, if not built by the last ruler of the dynasty, Zimri-Lim, was at least built by one of the last kings of Mari; its existence was not thought to have been a long one. The study of the architectural data, along with the discovery of a dynastic sequence of the *Shakkanakku*, led to the conclusion that

the construction of the building certainly dates back to Hanun-Dagan who ruled about 2000; as the final burning of the city is attributed to Hammurabi of Babylon about 1760 (traditional average chronology), the building would have existed for two and a half centuries.

The architecture and recent excavations have enabled definition of certain developments. It is however not possible to provide a clear image of the palace during its construction, only to analyse the final situation. It was possible to establish that the first construction was probably not very different from the final one; except for two late additions in the east and south, the new building was constructed in the same place as the palace of City II.

Besides the original characteristics, the general principle of organisation must be kept in mind: a large courtyard accessible from the sector of the entrance, then a second part that is more withdrawn, also seen in the Little Eastern Palace or in the Assyrian palaces. Also to be kept in mind are the permanence of the entrance gate with hinge sockets in the name of Hanun-Dagan, the maintenance of the Sacred Precinct in its basic characteristics, the placement of the Throne Room (but in a different system), probably the courtyard of the Date Palm (but functioning differently), and the whole of the western quarters whose morphology dates to the *Shakkanakku*.

The scope of the architects' project is clearly seen in the foundations planned at the time of construction, which ensured for some 250 years the solidity of the walls, which sometimes rose to more than 12 m.

### **The organisation of the Great Royal Palace (figs. 114, 115)**

#### **The entrances**

The main entrance is on the north side: a massive door between two pilasters at the end of paved steps rising from the street to the threshold and ending with two steps between the uprights. Another entrance, probably the Nergal Gate, opens 35 m to the east on the same façade, at ground level this time, to enable access to chariots and animals. A third access in the middle of the eastern façade ensures a secondary link between the Sacred Sector and the stables.

The main entrance opens onto a vestibule which enabled the service of opening and closing the double door of the gate to function. A first courtyard follows (fig. 114, space 154) that ensured relations with the eastern unit, the domain of the superintendent.

#### **The quarter of the superintendent**

Following the usual design of the central space surrounded by a series of rooms equipped with washrooms, a kitchen with several ovens and many hearths, it occupies the north-east angle.

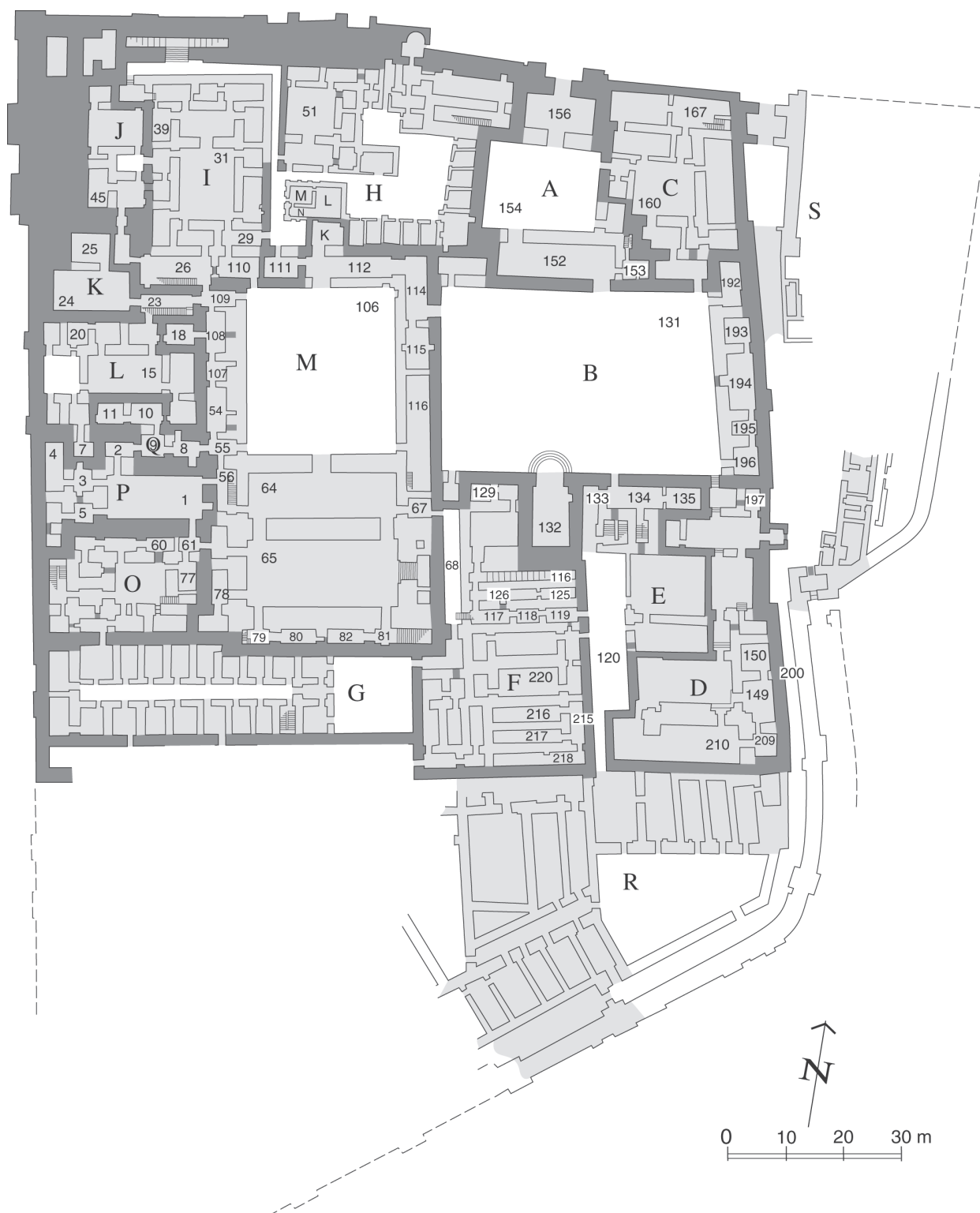


Figure 114: Plan showing sectors of the Great Royal Palace of City III.

### Guardroom 152

With two double doors, this oblong room joined the large courtyard 131 and formed a permanent security post or guardroom entrusted to a guard who would have been lodged there.

### Courtyard 131 or courtyard of the Temple of Paintings

The first paved courtyard was slightly trapezoidal (48.10 to 45.90 by 32 by 32.50) and probably equipped with a porch roof on certain façades. Three independent rooms, in

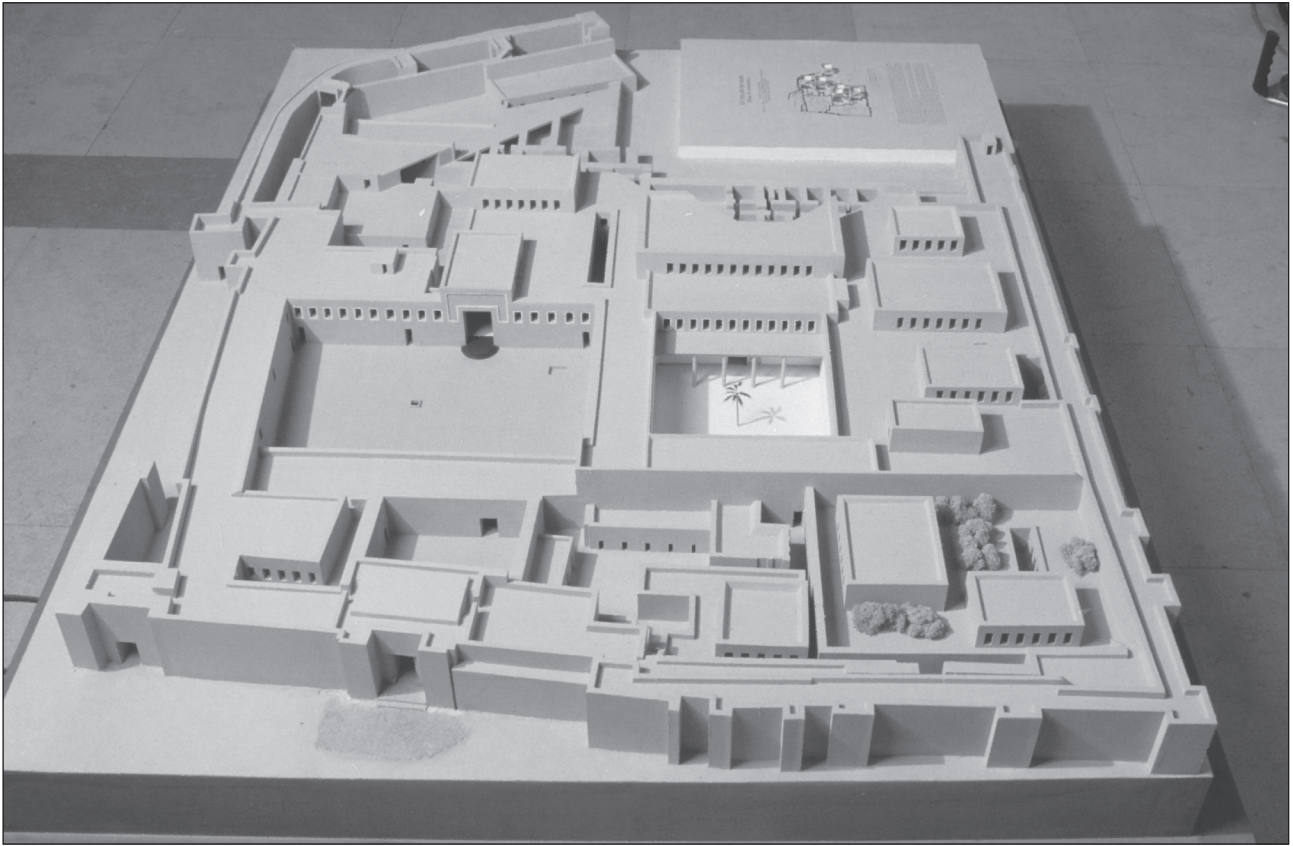


Figure 115: Model of the palace of City III at Mari, viewed from the north.

the north-east, north-west and south-west angles, probably served as surveillance posts, and a four-room apartment served as a storehouse (presence of jar stoppers and door seals).

A chapel dedicated to Ishtar, the Temple of Paintings according to the texts, opened widely onto a third of the southern façade, accessed by a semi-circular steps; the painting, dated to the *Shakkanakku* period, lay in pieces in the debris.

Courtyard 131 gave access to the quarter of the Superintendent in the north-east, to the Sacred Sector in the south-east, to the sector of the southern storerooms, and by a doorway in its north-west angle to the western half of the palace occupied by the House of the King, the Women's House and the official apartments.

### The Sacred Sector

Successor to the Sacred Precinct, the Sacred Sector retained some of latter's morphological features (Very Holy Place) and the main lines of the earlier organisation; but the central space was reduced, a chapel was added (spaces 149–150) and a new access, through a series of rooms having stairways in the passages, was established. The main temple appears to have been dedicated to the "Lady of the Palace", but the name of the divinity of the chapel is unknown, unless the principal god of the land had been

since City II worshipped in the great sanctuary and the Lady of the Palace was worshipped in the small chapel during the period of City III.

### Access to the economic domain

A secondary door in the southern façade of Courtyard 131 provided access to the great north-south artery which served a kind of square on the east side, and on the west side a series of parallel rooms used as storerooms. Farther along were the general storerooms.

### Courtyard 106 or Courtyard of the Palm Tree (fig. 116)

A T-shaped corridor, 114–112, accessible from the north-west angle of 131 and controlled through room 115, known for the diplomatic archives that it contained, provided access to courtyard 106 through a wide porch centred on the north face. In its final state, the courtyard measured 29.50 m by 25.50 m. The floor and walls were plastered, with a triple red-blue-red band intended to emphasise the architectural structure. Mural paintings covered the high parts of the walls and their corners up to the porch roof supported by four wooden pillars; a small basin/box in plaster was found against the wall and near the porch. And above all a large artificial palm tree was set in the middle in



a strong system of wedging. These were the elements that would have been perceived at first glance upon entering. The high quality of such an assemblage could only have impressed the visitor.

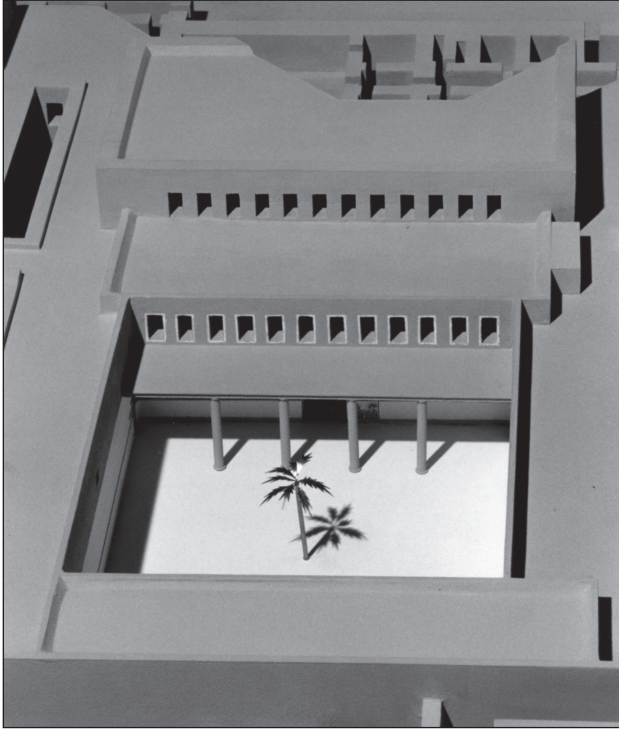


Figure 116: Great Royal Palace (City III): the official building and the courtyard of the palm tree.

From the north-west angle of Courtyard 106, the Women's House, which occupied the north-west sector of the palace, was accessible. At the south-west angle began the walkways that served the whole of the west wing. In the south-east angle a long room (116) served as a storeroom for oil.

### Room 64 or Papahum

Reached through a wide centred porch (3.10 m), this room, whose length (25.60 m) is equal to the short side of courtyard 106, is 7.70 wide. With its platform against the wall facing the entrance, a support for the statue of the Goddess of Flowing Waters, it marked an important sacral stage in the progression towards the Throne Room and also ensured relations with the western wing and the central part of the palace.

### Throne Room 65 and its annexes (figs. 117, 118)

Two doors at the ends of the southern wall of the *papahum* provided access; but during the final period, the western door was closed permanently and the room could be entered only by the eastern door, which meant that from the moment of entering the whole room could be taken in, with the king enthroned upon his dais against the short west side.

Being 26.30 m by 11.75 m with walls 5 m high at the time of excavation, it is the most imposing room of the palace. It was covered by a terrace that spanned directly, without any support from the ground. Its height was certainly at least equal to its width, or more.

A tamped earth floor had replaced the original plaster



Figure 117: Great Royal Palace (City III): the throne room at the time of discovery.

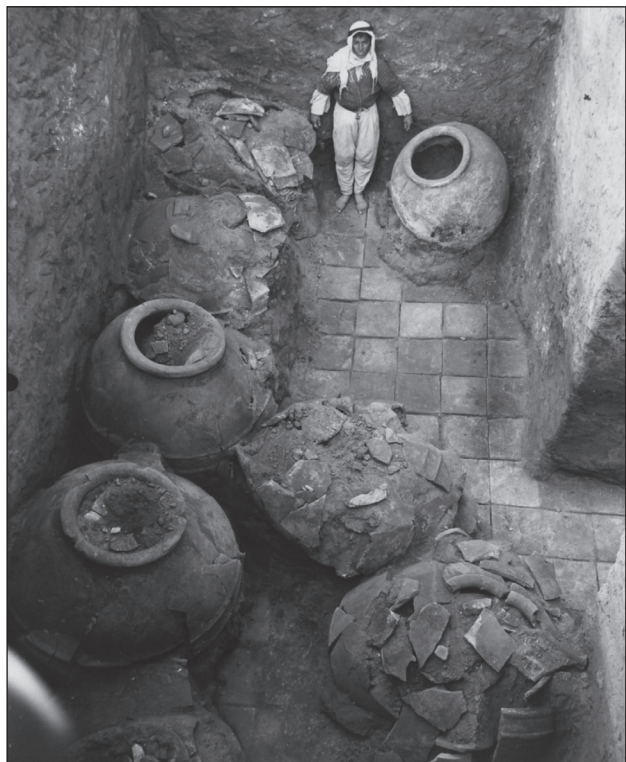


Figure 118: Great Royal Palace (City III): jars in a room adjacent to the throne room.

floor. Two tiled zones measuring about 2 m by 2 m were placed in the line of the room facing the slab supporting the throne; in the eastern part a layer of bitumen, small hearths and a system for evacuation of liquids completed the layout.

A tribune, accessible by a stairway of 11 steps, stood 1.70 m high on the short eastern side; this is a particularity of Mari, only found elsewhere thus far in the palace of Tell Bi'a. At its feet lay the statue of Ishtup-Ilum, which had probably fallen from it.

Relations existed with Administration Room 1 and the quarter of the ovens, these links being important for the daily life of the sector. Rooms to the west and south contained jars and a great mass of pottery of the smallest type; these rooms ensured the link with the upper storey, either by a steep stairway with an intermediate landing in 79, or in 81 by a very fine straight flight of stairs that provided access to the apartments of the king on the upper level.

### The unit for food services and ovens

This unit is located in the western continuation of the Throne Room, and was organised around a central space occupied by a large vaulted oven that replaced an older oven in the south-east angle. It was in relation with the Throne Room, the Administration Room and the slaves' quarters.

### The slaves' quarters of the House of the King

The slaves' quarters situated south of the Throne Room were accessed through a double door security passage (68) opening onto a courtyard (14 m per side) followed by a unit in which a central corridor lay between two series of ten small rooms with installations for everyday life.

### The Administration Room and annexes

Being 16.5 m by 7.6 m with a throne base it reproduced the Throne Room in a smaller form, but without a tribune. The size of the deposit of administrative tablets links it to an administrative function.

Three annexes composed of one to two rooms of domestic character were filled with hundreds of tablets fallen from the upper storey.

### A control post

A small group of four rooms in a row, placed at the junction of the House of the King and the Women's House, was certainly a control post for passage through the corridor which enabled command of the openings of room 55, a hub of circulation.

### The Women's House

At the north-west angle, two architectural units were part of the assemblage identified as the Women's House. The first, organised around central space 15, was equipped with several washrooms. The central space (12.50 m × 9.3 m) of the second unit, or Blue Unit, was decorated on three sides, to a height of 1.75 m, with a twisted frieze dominated by blue, and on the floor, with what appears to resemble a game of quoits. Between these two units, two rooms, 24 and 25, constitute a storeroom for products of consumption for the Women's House. A shaded terrace where the women could enjoy fresh air was probably set upon the wall, particularly large at this place. The slaves' quarters of the Women's House extended to the east of the Blue Unit.

### The later additions

The two main additions, accessible from the Nergal Gate (the eastern extension, probably intended to house the stables as well as chariots, and the general storerooms in the south) had considerably enlarged the surface area of the palace, certainly at the expense of the urban environment; the storerooms could demonstrate the growth of the role of the palace in the economic management of the country. As they are incompletely excavated and often only to the level of the foundations, it is not possible to analyse the way in which they functioned.



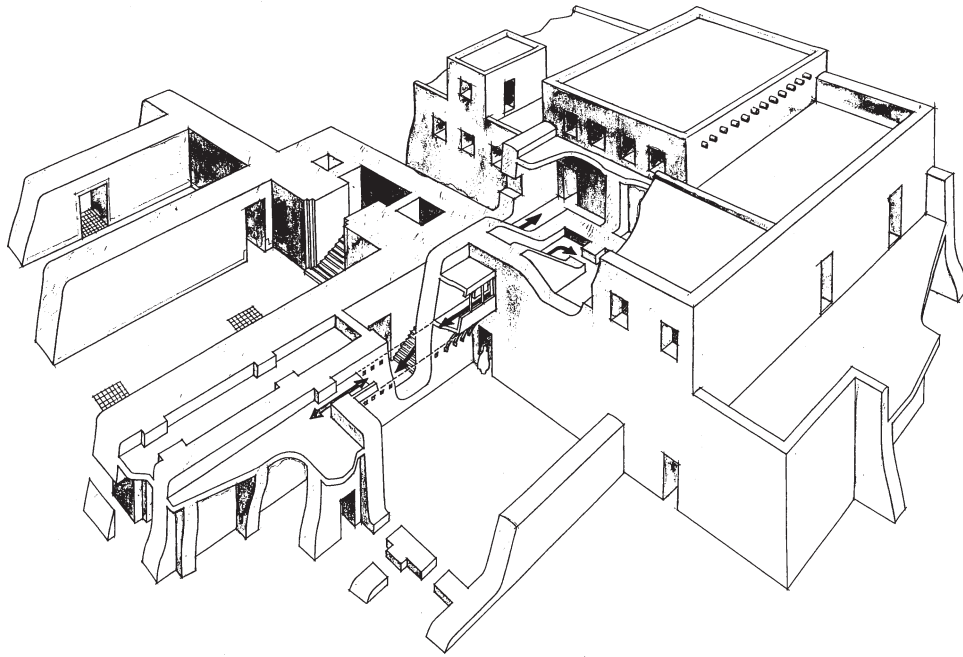


Figure 119: Volumetric reconstruction of the relation between the throne room and the private apartments of the king in the Great Royal Palace of City III.

### The works of Samsî-Addu

Extensive modifications were carried out under the king of Upper Mesopotamia. These occurred in the official block first of all, with the doubling of the western wall which necessitated a readjustment of the doors and the remaking (?) of the mural paintings on the south side, except for the Painting of the Investiture. Then the private apartments of the king were constructed in the block used for storage located between the southern edge of the chapel of Ishtar, corridor 68 east of the Throne Room group, and corridor 120 (also called 139/120) west of the sector of the temples; the southern edge appears to have been the southern wall of room 218. The study of the distribution of the walls and the plan of the fallen fragments of painting has led to the conclusion that the upper storey consisted of a large central space with a reception room according to the traditional outline. Finally, the entire organisation of the upper storey was set in place. All the information available indicates that Samsî-Addu was responsible.

### Main architectural features (fig. 115)

This analysis of the remains found in excavation does not provide a true picture of the architecture of the palace of Mari. The excavation first of all, then the architectural and archaeological analyses, have led to the vital conclusion, valid for the palace as well as for all Mesopotamian architecture, that the entire building had an upper storey. Thus the vestiges found in the excavation could not have provided an exact image of the palace, and it also became clear that the usable surface area, without being doubled

because of the courtyards, would have been considerably increased by an upper storey; the entire way the building functioned was put into question.

It was also hastily concluded that the units composing the palace formed a morphological unit, by establishing a model called “Babylonian” with a central courtyard. The reality is quite different, as it is the morphological diversity of the units that had become the rule, according to the specific uses the builder wished to assign them.

The relation of the internal space to light and the use of verticality were the factors that determined the choices; the capture of light was effected either from the centre of the building by means of a clerestory (“centred” plan or “central space” plan), or from the periphery by means of an open space around the unit (outside passages, for example), or from the ends of long juxtaposed rooms. The verticality did not change this arrangement in series, but diversified the applications. It was the function of the upper storey that determined the organisation of the ground floor; the whole complex (ground floor ⇔ upper floor) did not result in the simple replication on the upper floor of the organisation of the ground floor (fig. 119); the edges of the unit on the upper floor could be different from those of the ground floor, and the courtyards could be limited in number (five in all: 131, 106, 154, 87 and perhaps 148).

### The functions of the Great Royal Palace

The apparent complexity of the palace is the reflection of its many functions.

The palace was first of all the residence of the king. The king had his home, like any man. But he was a man with



special powers, the master of his land after the gods and at the same time the servant of the god of the city. At Mari he was not a priest, but played the role of intermediary and had a place in the universe of the gods; as master he directed the destiny of his land, even if he called upon soothsayers. He administered his domain and the whole of the kingdom's territory, ensured its security and conducted relations with other kings and cities.

All this indicates that the palace was a very particular universe, not only the House of the King as has been advanced, but a complex in which the many aspects of the king's activity, of his private life and of his power in all its forms were expressed.

The palace is thus an expression of power, with a particular space that is related to a temple but still clearly distinguished from it, a space that is not intended to receive guests as in an individual home. This is the space of royal function. During the lifetime of the building, this space evolved. In the period of the *Shakkanakku* it appears to have been composed essentially of the Throne Room, but during the period of the Amorite dynasty this hall was integrated into a vast tripartite complex consisting of the courtyard of the Palm Tree, the *Papahum* or vestibule under the aegis of the Goddess of Flowing Waters, and finally the royal hall. The palm tree, the paintings of courtyard 106 and the Goddess of Flowing Waters illustrate by their symbolism all the specificity of the place.

However, it was the Throne Room that played the primary role. It was the meeting place for the king with his subjects and visitors, a reception hall for foreign ambassadors, as well as a place for subjects to render tribute to their king, and to judge by the Painting of the Investiture, a place where encounter occurred between the king and the divinity. It was also the favoured room for banquets, indicated by the organisation of the sector, with storerooms for wine and beer in adjoining rooms, and the proximity of the kitchens. Certain typically royal rituals, such as the *Kispum*, a celebration in honour of dead kings, could have taken place when the tomb located in the Little Eastern Palace was not required.

The direct relation of this room with the royal apartments clearly indicates that the king had many functions; when he emerged from his private domain, he necessarily entered into communication and action.

The palace was also a political, administrative and economic centre. However, there is no explicit architectural expression of a political space, or rather this is embedded in all parts of the palace devoted to the expression of royal power (courtyard of the Palm Tree, *Papahum*, Throne Room), to administrative activities (Hall of Administration and other centres where texts were found, as well as jar seals and bundles of merchandise, for example) and to economic management (wherever there were storerooms, sometimes recognisable in the architecture – long narrow rooms in series – or by the presence of seals on the doors).

The legacy of the Sacred Precinct of City II conferred upon the palace of City III a special sacred character that

is not found in any other royal building of the beginning of the second millennium. Although this feature was very much present at Mari and deeply affected everyday life, it is not found anywhere else.

### *Life in the Great Royal Palace*

This was concentrated first of all in the House of the King, which groups together the five units, perfectly articulated: the official group, where the most important demonstrations of his function occurred, the administration building, which was the dominant centre for administrative management, the services sector with the kitchens, the apartments of the King, being the most secluded sector, and the slaves' quarters. The whole is grouped around the two halls, that of the Goddess of Flowing Waters and that of the Throne Room, with the courtyard of the Palm Tree playing the role of a majestic vestibule. The Throne Room, with its enormous volume rising to 12 or 14 m in height with no horizontal separation, appears to have been the centre and the organising principle of the entire House of the King.

The second centre consists of the Women's House, which was the result, in the last stage of the palace, of an amalgamation of different units which had lost their original function to become reassembled in one great residence which apparently accommodated some 250 women, among whom were the women of the royal family, wives (a dozen for Zimri-lim?), and young unmarried girls (23 princesses?), female musicians, a variety of domestic personnel and guards.

The servants were probably more numerous than the teams that were present in the sectors reserved for the slaves of the House of the King or the Women's House; their quarters provide a fairly clear definition of the space reserved for this group of the population. They left evidence of their devotion in the form of small figurines that are very similar from one sector to another. Life could not have been particularly happy for these people, and it is known through certain texts that some attempted to escape. But it is improbable that the two groups in the House of the King and the Women's House served the whole palace; probably there were other teams for religious service or tasks which involved the general storerooms. Certain servants had perhaps more freedom and lived elsewhere than in the quarters discovered in the House of the King and in the Women's House. No information concerning them has come down to us.

There is plenty of evidence for the conditions of everyday life, seen in the different kitchens and ovens, the many washrooms (squat toilets and tanks for water), the fireplaces for heating water rather than rooms, the aeration pipes to ensure ventilation of certain parts of the ground floor, the known existence of a cold room (but was it in the palace?), the drainage pits, the pipes for rainwater recovery, the reservoirs for provision of water to different parts of the palace and for recovered rainwater, the series of moulds in relief from the royal table.





Figure 121: The throne room of the Little Eastern Palace (City III).



Figure 122: Little Eastern Palace (City III): location of the throne and postholes for the canopy.



Figure 123: Little Eastern Palace (City III): a large tannour.

access to the third section of the palace, consisting of two juxtaposed units with a central space united by a common corridor; their function is uncertain.

The stratigraphy and the architecture reveal two major phases: associated with the original plan, a very fine plaster floor on a bed of pebbles, which had a long existence, then a floor of fired tiles that was in use for a long time

(a level subjected to serious attack by erosion at the base of the walls), and for the final phase, strongly affected by the ravages of time, a last floor made of tamped earth and clearly quite crude.

Tablets and seal impressions point in particular to Hitlal-Erra, son of Puzur-Eshtar, when he was *nu banda*, that is, crown prince, probably around the end of the first



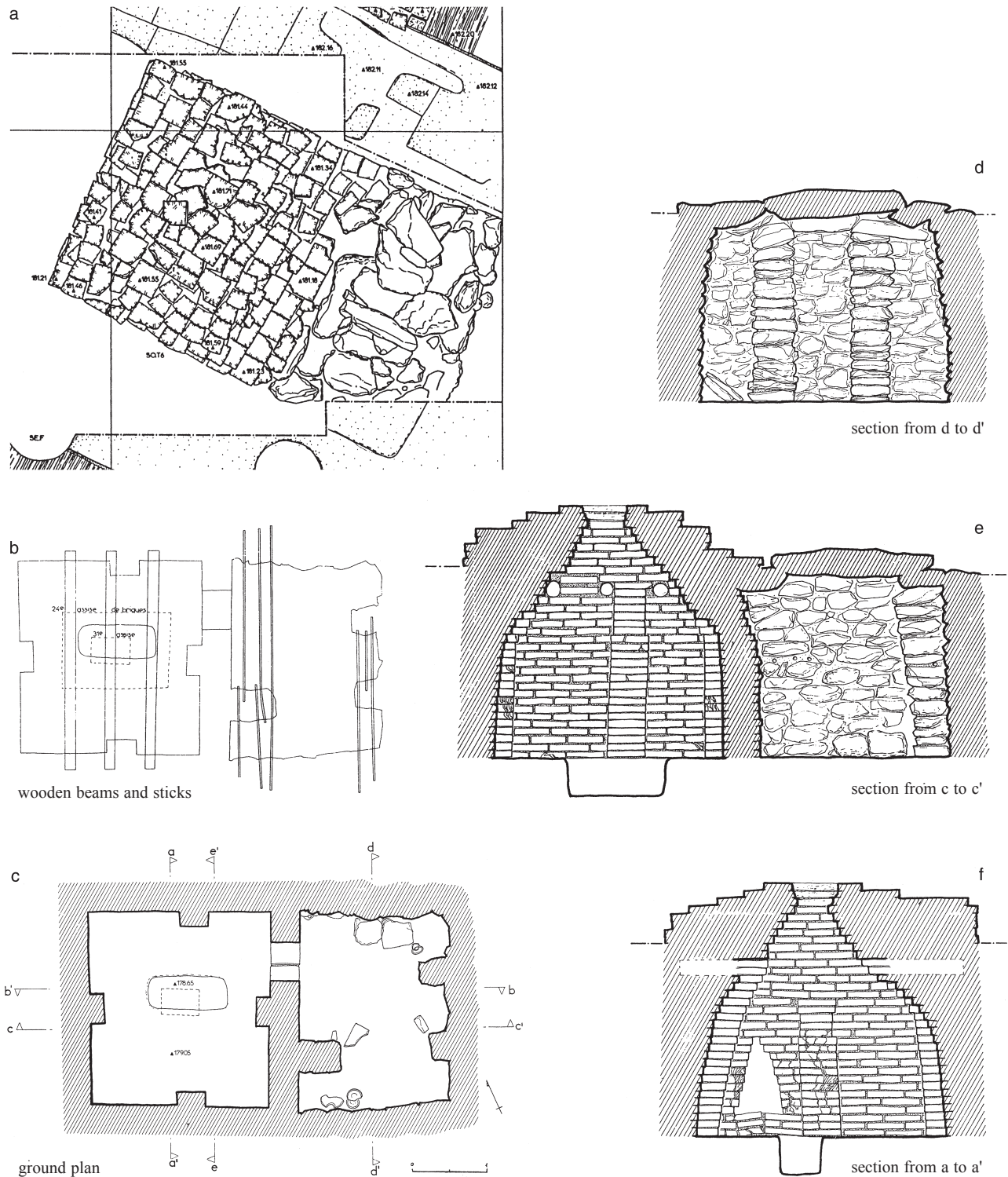


Figure 124: The tomb under hall I of the Little Eastern Palace of City III: [a] plan; [b] beams and wooden rods; [c] plan on the ground; [d] cross-section from d to d'; [e] cross-section from c to c'; [f] cross-section from a to a'.

phase of the floor. In the period of the Amorite dynasty, the soothsayer Asqudum, brother-in-law of the king, also occupied this palace, as well as the queen mother.

The unique nature of this palace lies in the fact that it contained two constructed tombs beneath the ground floor.

The first hypogeum (fig. 124) lay under the great hall I: a very fine funerary chamber constructed in fired bricks, approximately square in plan (2.65 m × 2.50 m) and vaulted with corbelling (maximal height 2.40 m); each side was equipped with a median interior buttress that merged with

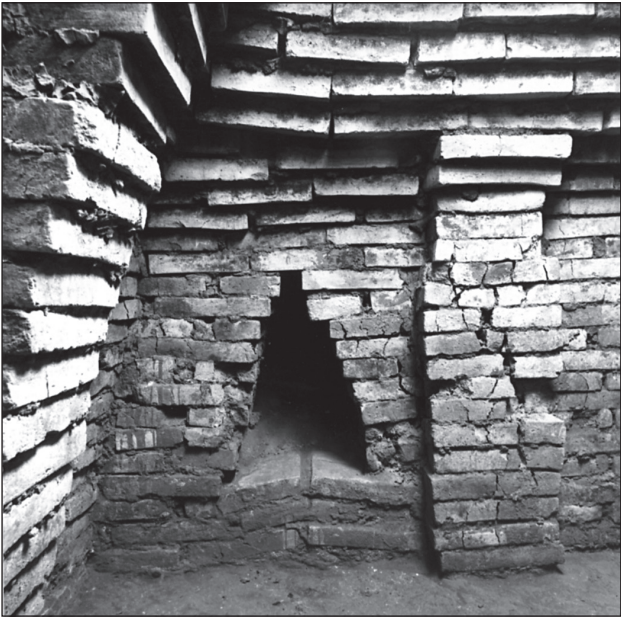


Figure 125: The tomb under hall I of the Little Eastern Palace (City III).

the corbelling. 1.70 m above the floor, a wooden ceiling closed the top of the tomb. At the base of the south-east side near the east angle, a triangular opening (base 42 cm and height 70 cm) ensured the relation with a second room, in fact the *dromos* (1.50 m by 2 m), the entranceway to the tomb constructed with the help of gypsum blocks and having buttresses opposite each other to support the covering slabs (fig. 125)

To judge by traces in the stratigraphy, the tomb was penetrated at least once after it was first closed.

Except for a beaker found in the funerary chamber, the material comes from the *dromos* and consists of a few small cups, dated to the end of the twenty-first century BC, that were of no interest to the looters who emptied the tomb.

The second hypogeum (fig. 126), much more imposing but also in worse condition, the vault having collapsed, was found under the Throne Room. Rectangular in plan, 6.80 m  $\times$  3.78 m plus 1.40 m for the thickness of the walls, it was constructed in fired bricks and vaulted with corbelling; its floor, originally paved with fired tiles, lay 4.5 m beneath the level of the palace.

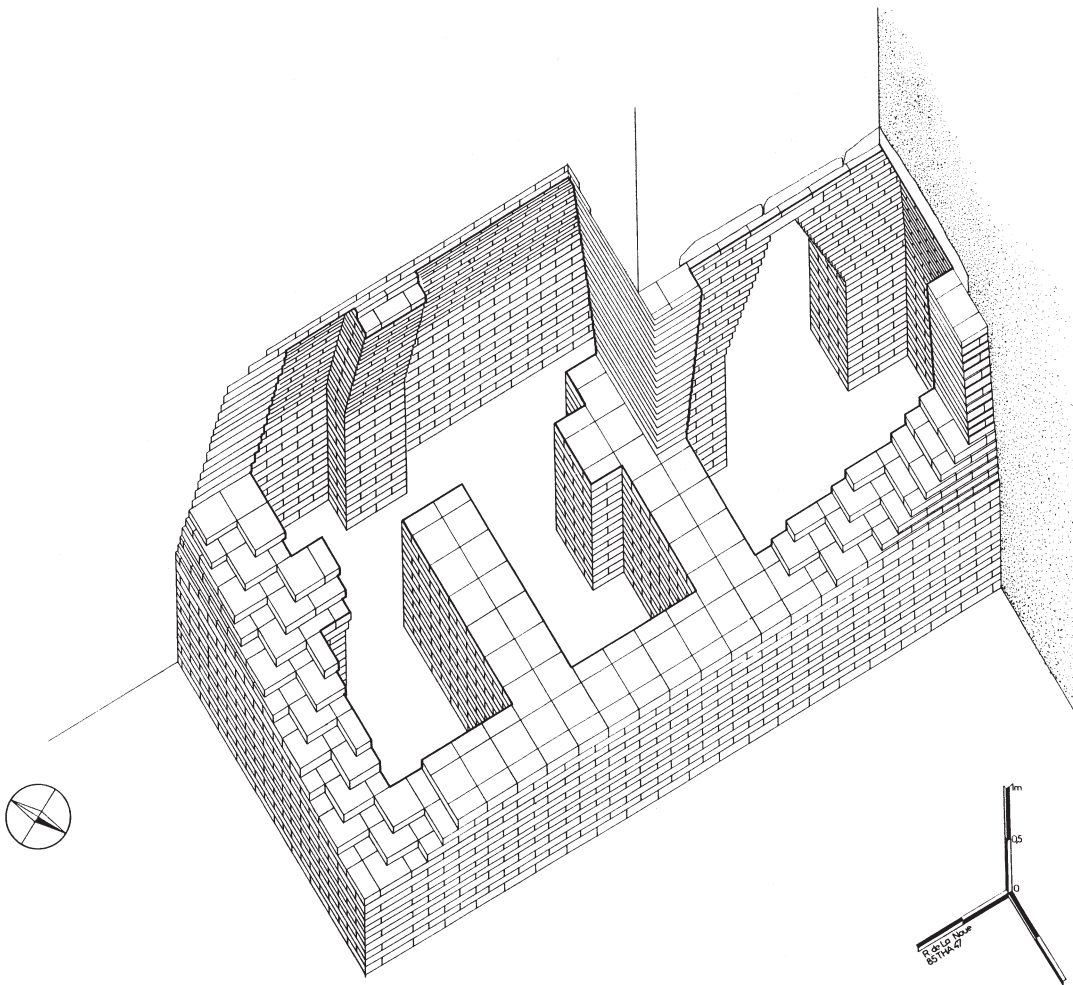


Figure 126: Axonometric projection of the tomb under the throne room of the Little Eastern Palace (City III).



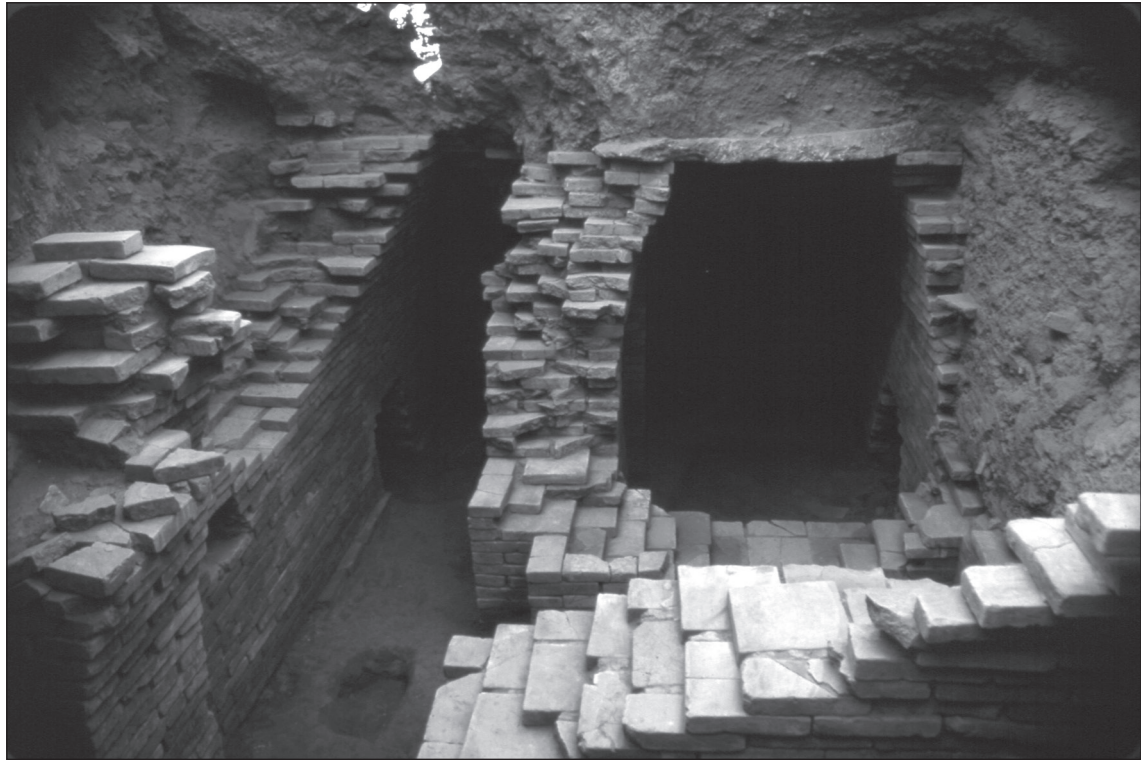


Figure 127: The tomb under the throne room of the Little Eastern Palace (City III) at the time of discovery.

Five different spaces made up this tomb. The largest, 2.70 m by 1.66 m (chamber A) is the only one that was not completely vaulted with corbelling and was closed by stone slabs; it served as a *dromos* (entranceway). In the centre a mysterious shaft was discovered, sunk more than 4 m beneath the floor (a shaft made by looters or a pit related to the tomb?). The second (space B) is a quite long corridor (4.73 m by 1.06 m) that provided a link between the *dromos* and the 3 other spaces (C, D and E), which were certainly funerary chambers despite their small size (between 1.30 and 1.50 each side).

Practically nothing has been found because of the looters, who were responsible for the collapse of the vault (fig. 127), only some beads and elements of inlay for boxes.

The way the palace was constructed (fig. 128) was dominated by the presence of the tombs; these were not dug into the ground, but built before the palace, although the latter had already been planned. The builders thus proceeded in the following way: on the site upon which the palace was to be built, on a completely levelled surface (phase 1) and according to the plan, they dug an enormous pit, at least 4.50 m deep, at the future location of the Throne Room, a little more than 3 m (at least) under room I (phase 2); they then built the tombs in a concomitant manner, at the same time filling in the rest of the excavation (phases 3 to 5), in order to provide equal pressure on the corbelled vaults supported by struts on the inside; when the tombs were closed (phases 5 and 6), the walls around the future palace (phases 6 to 8) were constructed directly on the

backfill that had been made uniform, without foundations; exceptionally, this palace had no upper storey.

This building performed two functions: it was a palace-hypogeum, but also a substitute palace. As a palace-hypogeum, it functioned like any house of this period that sheltered its dead; but was it also a funerary temple? This hypothesis is not valid as the plan was not organised to allow exercise of a religion, but for daily life; funerary rites, those of the *Kispum*, would certainly been carried out for the dead kings buried beneath the palace, but the building could have also served for other functions. Why then was it decided to construct under this secondary palace two royal hypogea? The first certain evidence of the burial of sovereigns under their palaces comes from the end of the third millennium (Ur, Mari). However, this new practice could not be carried out at any location; the sacred area of a temple could not receive human bones, essentially impure. The *Shakkanakku* dynasty chose to occupy the royal palace that contained the most important temple of City II. All burial being forbidden in this spot, it became necessary to build a palace in another place in the city, which became an annexe of the Great Royal Palace, where the new types of burial could be practised.

But it was also a substitute palace, as it presents all the characteristics of a normal palace (fig. 129), without any significant feature of a sanctuary. Its inhabitants were all members of the royal family, as much at the time of the *Shakkanakku* as that of the Amorites. At the same time as the necessity to build royal tombs occurred, the need for a



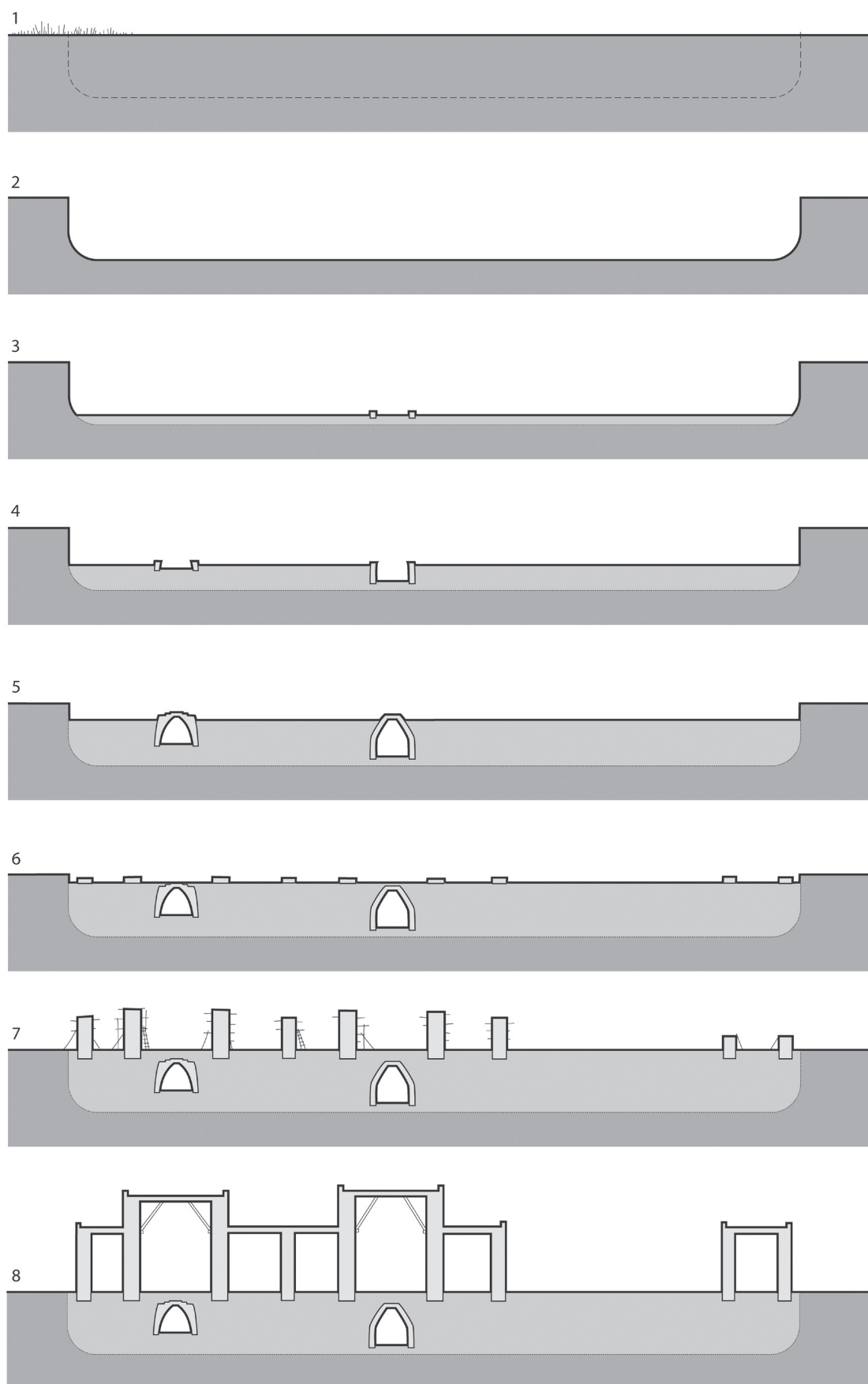


Figure 128: The stages in the building of the Little Eastern Palace of City III.



*Figure 129: Kitchen with sink and tannour.*

residence for the king during the reconstruction of the Great Royal Palace was perhaps the reason for its construction. This was why the Throne Room, the major expression of royal power, was centrally placed, and why the royal apartment was closely associated with it.

The importance of this building may be observed in

two new features. It is the first known example of the division of a palace into two parts that are closely related to the system of *babanu/bitanu* of the Assyrian palaces, the Throne Room joining together the two domains. And in the Throne Room it provides the oldest evidence for a coffered ceiling.

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## VIII. The development of funerary practices

For twelve centuries Mari was an active city, during which time the dead tended to be buried under the floors of houses. During the following thirty-seven centuries, the tell was deserted and sometimes sporadically reoccupied, thus lending itself to use as a cemetery. At Mari as at other sites, burials have provided rich and varied information for archaeologists, faithfully reflecting the world of the living; most of the material recovered on Near Eastern excavations comes from tombs.

### Burials in City I

Burials occurred as soon as humans were present on the site; the work of preparing the site probably caused many deaths among the slaves and the servant populations, indicated by the bodies found on the original ground level in tombs constructed of mud brick without any funerary objects (excavation area Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct). The term cemetery can be used for these earliest burials; from then onward the tombs were placed in the earth beneath the houses.

Associated with the levels of occupation that followed the foundation of the city, some sixty tombs were excavated, often directly in the ground and separated from each other, or constructed in mud brick. The bodies were found in a stretched-out or folded position, with no particular orientation, and usually accompanied by funerary objects consisting of pottery (vessels, jars and dishes), bronze vessels, weapons (daggers, bronze axes), tools (bronze scissors, sharpening tools in stone), and elements of jewellery (bronze pins, rings of gold, silver and bronze, silver bracelets, various beads in frit, cornelian, lapis-lazuli and gypsum); jewellery (a small gold chain), beads (a complete necklace of large lapis-lazuli beads) and a very fine alabaster vase are examples that demonstrate the wealth of the inhabitants of City I.

Five monumental tombs in stone, built using the technique of corbelling, separate or in groups of two, were brought to light in the north of the site and in the lower strata of the sector of the temple of Ishtar; all had been more or less plundered. However, tomb 300 produced interesting material. Such tombs are known in the Near East for the beginning of and during the third millennium; it appears that they should be chronologically situated at the end of City I, or possibly in an intermediate period between Cities I and II (fig. 130).

### Burials in City II

The funerary material of City II is not abundant. Some tombs rich in ceramic as well as metal objects were found in excavation areas F and K. In the sector of the Souk, many tombs uncovered before the Second World War do not provide enough characteristics to be attributed with certainty to one of the phases of Early Dynasty II or the Akkadian period; those found by André Parrot in this sector are probably tombs of the period of the *Shakkanakku*.

The rareness of burials attributable to City II is in large part due to the fact that the excavations concentrated on the temples and the palace-temple, sacred sectors where the dead would not be buried, and to the fact that the residential quarters were only partially explored, without being excavated beneath the level of occupation.

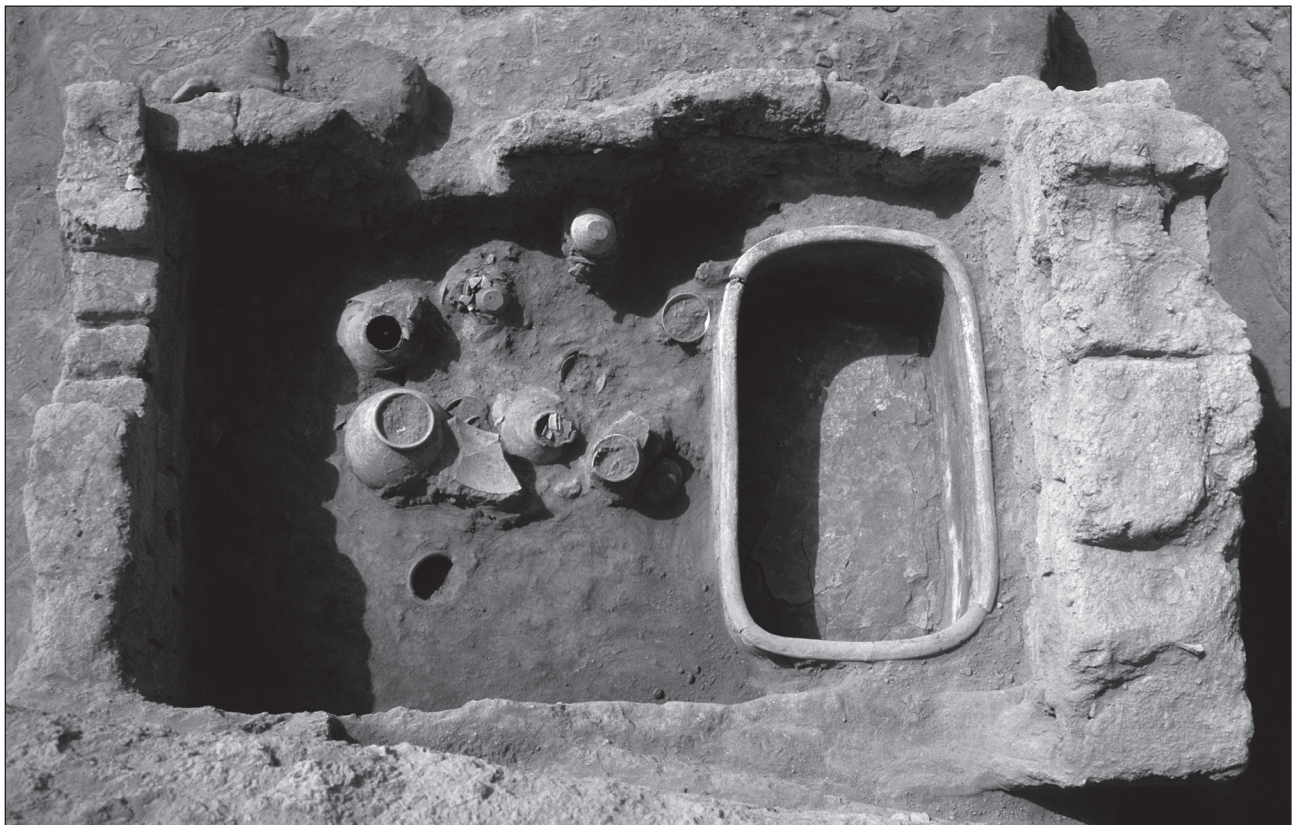
### Burials in the period of the *Shakkanakku*

For this period there are more than 200 tombs and four types of burial: graves dug in the ground (70), burials in jars (95), constructed tombs with a burial chamber (7), and sarcophagi (28) that appear to have been set in the





*Figure 130: Stone tombs of City I.*



*Figure 131: Example of a Shakkanakku tomb beneath a house, with sarcophagus and funerary objects.*

ground beneath the houses. Although it does not appear that whole families were united in the domestic graves, no evidence has been found to advance the possibility that there were cemeteries inside the city.

It is not known whether one type of burial was preferred over another. The House of the Potter clearly illustrates

this difficulty of interpretation. Two tombs belonging to the same occupation level were found in two adjacent rooms, the bodies lying on the right side, arms folded, legs bent, feet near the pelvis; but one was placed in a ceramic sarcophagus with a cover and set in the centre of the space and under a hearth, while the other was also buried under



a hearth situated in the centre, but directly in the ground. The funerary objects are remarkably similar: 17 and 15 pottery objects respectively, and for each of the dead a toggle-pin and a circular plaque in bronze were placed near the skull, a rectangular bronze plaque on the breast, a knife and a hatchet with folded-back flange in bronze and a cornelian bead being also included.

Some domestic tombs were particularly carefully made: a large chamber ( $2.27 \times 1.45$  m; remaining height 1.17 m), constructed in mud brick, covered with wooden logs placed



Figure 132: Tomb of Zinuba, a son of the Shakkanakku Iddin-Illum.

longitudinally, was occupied in its northern first third by a sarcophagus oriented east-west whose cover was broken and had fallen upon the remains of a young individual lying in the same position as the individual found in the sarcophagus of the House of the Potter. All the material was found together in the southern part of the sarcophagus and consisted of 26 pottery vessels of various shapes, an axe with folded flange in bronze and various small Caprinae bones found in some vessels (fig. 131).

Although the Little Eastern Palace has provided evidence for royal tombs, it was surprising to find buried directly in the ground the tomb of a son of a *Shakkanakku* in a jar fallen on its side (excavation area B). The funerary objects consisted of 4 pottery vessels, 2 silver toggle-pins with a gold ring passed through the eye, 1 open ring in gold, 8 open rings in silver situated near the skull, 1 fragmentary perforated plaque in bronze, 1 bronze dish, 1 bronze bowl with chased decoration on the body, 7 cornelian beads and a cylinder seal with an inscription giving the name of the prince: “Iddin-Illum, *Shakkanakku* of Mari, Zinuba his son” (fig. 132).

Another particularly rich tomb, that of a young woman aged 18 to 20 years, called “the princess” by the excavators, was found buried directly in the ground in a disturbed sector of excavation area F; besides the 21 pottery vessels and two bronze vessels present as funerary goods, the richness of the ornaments on the clothing (coiled plaque in silver, discs in gold and silver, pendant, silver toggle-pins with gold ring...) and the jewellery (forehead band in gold, earrings, necklaces with more than 140 beads in gold, cornelian and lapis-lazuli, bracelets, finger rings...) was exceptional, but there is no other evidence to define her social status (fig. 133).

Two children, probably 2 years in age, were buried beneath the first course of the foundation of the House of



Figure 133: Jewellery from a woman's grave of the Shakkanakku period in open ground.

the Potter, each with a *unio* shell, a small vessel on the body and a beaker by the head. They present a difficult problem: buried during the construction of the walls, do these children represent coincidental deaths in the same family or were they foundation sacrifices (fig. 77)?

For the time of the *Shakkanakku*, the objects represent great diversity and real wealth: bones that are usually from sheep or goats were found, probably from a deposit of meat offered to the dead, pottery in profusion (even up to two dozen vessels for one burial), jewellery and various ornaments for the body and for clothing, objects in bronze – vessels and various recipients, weapons and tools. All of these provide evidence for everyday life and show the wealth of Mari in this period.

### Burials in the Amorite period (fig. 134)

Although a few graves dug directly in the earth can be attributed to this period, the customary type of burial was within a jar buried in the earth beneath the house. This is demonstrated in the large residence of excavation area F and in the House of the Tablets of excavation area K where, beneath the central space (4 m by 4 m), 10 tombs in jars were packed together in a depth of 2 m to 2.5 m. This concentration indicates an important development in mentalities since the *Shakkanakku* period; although in that period burials occurred beneath houses, it is obvious that not all the individuals who had lived in those houses were buried there.

The excavation of the residence of excavation area F produced more than a hundred burials, mostly in jars, which confirms the observations made in the house of excavation area K. The burials occurred normally over the entire area beneath the house, no space being excluded from this practice. The number of jars buried indicates that this residence was used over a long period.

The funerary objects are as a whole less rich and less diverse than in the *Shakkanakku* period; pottery is largely present, as well as some ornaments for clothing, but this is far from the richness of the burials of the previous period, and indicative of Mari's impoverishment during its last years.

### Burials in the Khana Period

The disappearance of Mari as a capital did not mean that activity ended. Sporadic re-occupations, although small in scale, led to large cemeteries.

More than forty graves were brought to light in the southern half of the Little Eastern Palace, dated to the period that followed its destruction. These are very poor, half of them without any funerary material, and demonstrate, with the installations on the surface, the state of distress of the city after its destruction. Most of the graves were dug directly in the earth, some burials were in jars, and some were carefully placed at the base of the

walls of the great hall I of the Little Palace, the bodies laid beneath a slight overhang (emphasising the line of destruction by erosion) in a position parallel to the wall.

### Burials in the Middle Assyrian period

Three cemeteries containing more than 400 tombs (that have been excavated) of the Middle Assyrian period were established in courtyards 106 and 131 of the Great Royal Palace and in the north of the High Terrace. They provide good evidence for a period that is otherwise poorly represented archaeologically.

The types of burial (directly in the ground, jar, double-bell jar) reflect earlier practices, already in use in City III but in very different proportions. It also appears that the child/adult proportion does not differ from what it was during the great periods of the city when the dead were interred in the earth beneath the houses and it is difficult, as was thought at the time of discovery, to recognise a population dominated by a military caste, as only 11 tombs, 4%, contained weapons.

Some tombs in courtyard 106 were particularly rich, but in courtyard 131, there was only one rich tomb, although this cemetery contained many more burials. Tomb 125 is particularly striking in its sumptuous jewellery: a necklace made of 14 elements with quadruple spirals in gold, 9 beads in cornelian, lapis-lazuli, amber and glass paste, a second necklace composed of 16 cornelian beads carved in the form of pomegranates and of frit beads, a gold ring in the form of a crescent, an iron bracelet, an anklet ring and 4 finger rings in shell; among the objects there were also a double-sided bone comb, decorated with dotted circles, and a glazed ceramic dish. Tomb 34 contained only metal: a bracelet, a funnel-sieve, a bowl and a quiver, all in bronze, and 5 iron arrowheads. But most of the burials are poor in objects, one vessel and one bead not being indicative of high social standing.

The nature of the objects well characterises this period of splendour in Near Eastern civilisation; besides the ordinary pottery are small vessels in glazed pottery, small boxes in wood or in alabaster with a ribbed body, small masks, many objects in bronze, some in iron, combs and needles in bone, ostrich eggs, gold jewellery and the beads that have given these cemeteries their reputation. There is no evidence to confirm that these objects were produced at Mari. There is an evident contradiction between the number of tombs and the apparent importance of the site in this period, which suggests that all this material was either imported or consisted of ordinary goods of a population living at Mari that worked for another political centre.

### Burials in the village of the Seleucid period

Some 130 tombs were excavated, which apparently belong to this long period of several centuries, characterised by the low number of graves dug directly in the ground and





*Figure 134: Jar-tombs beneath the large residence of the Amorite period in excavation area F.*

the frequency of typical nutshell-shaped tombs. The burials of this period are very poor: weapons are rare, ornaments are few, and except for one or two exceptions, there is an absence of exceptional jewellery. Pottery is often present, but is absent in more than half the tombs. However, a notable find is a headband on which are fixed 12 gold leaves triangular in shape and two silver pendants, each decorated with two female faces side by side with braids.

Related to funeral practices and representative of ordinary materials are shrouds, turbans and vestiges of leather (sandals, cover of a wicker basket), remains which could often be analysed and which have provided technological information, for textiles in particular; also discovered was a basket made of spiralled willow, covered in leather and with a cover, which contained a small wooden box that had been carefully worked.

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## IX. Objects and installations of everyday life

The objects and installations related to everyday life recovered during more than 40 excavation campaigns are rich and diversified. They provide information on the manipulation of materials, enable estimation of the levels of technology and indicate the fundamental material choices made by the populations. But we can only study the material that has been preserved, all that was perishable in the humid environment of the Euphrates valley having disappeared, and with it an entire chapter concerning manufacturing activity. Moreover, most of the material comes from tombs, which are perhaps not an exact reflection of reality, but rather the result of choices whose reasons escape us. As for the architecture, the vision of the archaeologist is incomplete and probably distorted. The only archaeological approach likely to give results is based on seriation, a method that is impossible to apply here. Thus, rather than a sterile inventory, only a brief outline will be given in an attempt to understand the importance of Mari as a centre of artisanal production and the nature and extent of the trade carried out.

The management of water was very well organised inside the palace (figs 135, 136, 137). Rainwater was collected on the terraces and channelled to underground reservoirs, called *iggum*, situated in various places in the palace, for example under courtyard 106; in addition, bands of women walked to and fro throughout the day to fetch water from the canal that crossed the city and to store it in a large underground reservoir in the middle of courtyard 131. Only one opening in the form of a well emerged at the surface of this courtyard; here other women assigned to the task of water redistribution came to fetch water to be poured into tanks – often wrongly called “baths” – in the different apartments of the palace. Wastewater was simply eliminated directly from the place of use into vertical cesspools, usually cylindrical, which rejoined the water table under the tell. The channels

constructed in brick or stone served only to conduct drinking water collected on the terraces to the reservoirs (*iggum*) and practically never to eliminate wastewater.

### Nature of the material found

Pottery, the most common material found on archaeological excavations, provides an essential basis for understanding the technological capabilities of the potters, but is also at the heart of dating procedures. It has thus enabled the period of existence of the first city of Mari to be established, but has not provided a clear determination of the period of its foundation, except in a complementary fashion through thermo-luminescence analysis, as morphological comparisons are still not precise enough. Without any truly significant pieces found at the bottom of the trenches that reached the level of the first occupation, it is not possible to rely on the pottery, also because the material available from the first levels is still insufficient. However, material dated to Early Dynasty I, according to the generally accepted chronology, provides clear evidence of a date between 3000 and 2800 BC, while the stone tombs of the lower sector of the temple of Ishtar probably indicate the end of City I (twenty-seventh century?).

For City I, the shapes of the common pottery are not particularly varied (fig. 138). Some are highly characteristic, such as jugs and small jars with a straight spout placed at the upper part of the body and very round jars and cooking pots; besides the common pottery, there is the pottery called “metallic”. Some examples of Scarlet Ware, generally jars decorated with geometric and naturalistic motifs (fig. 139), point to eastern Iraq (valley of Diyala and Hamrin), but a few isolated examples are not proof of a dominating influence. Pottery sherds and sometimes complete pots, identified as Ninevite V, of the incised series characteristic of the upper Tigris and the





Figure 135: Cistern under the floor of courtyard 131 for water supply to the Great Royal Palace (City III).



Figure 137: Channels built of baked bricks under the palace of City III.



Figure 136: An iggum (cistern for collecting rainwater) in the Courtyard of the Palm Tree.



Figure 138: Water-jar (City I).

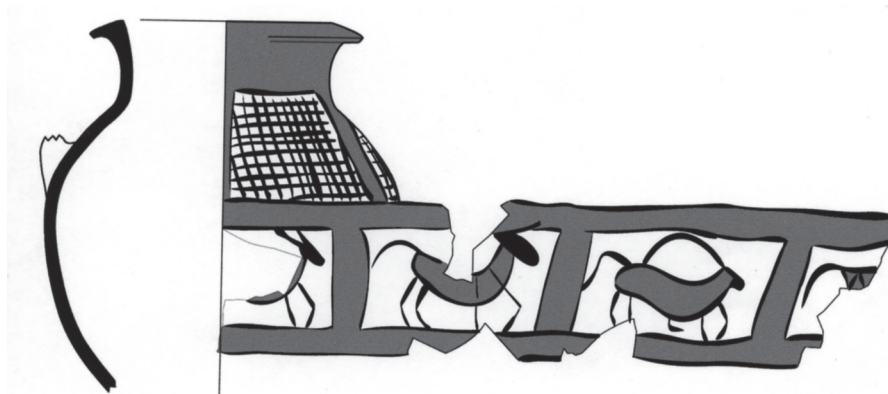


Figure 139: Vessel of Scarlet Ware type from under a floor of City I in excavation area L.



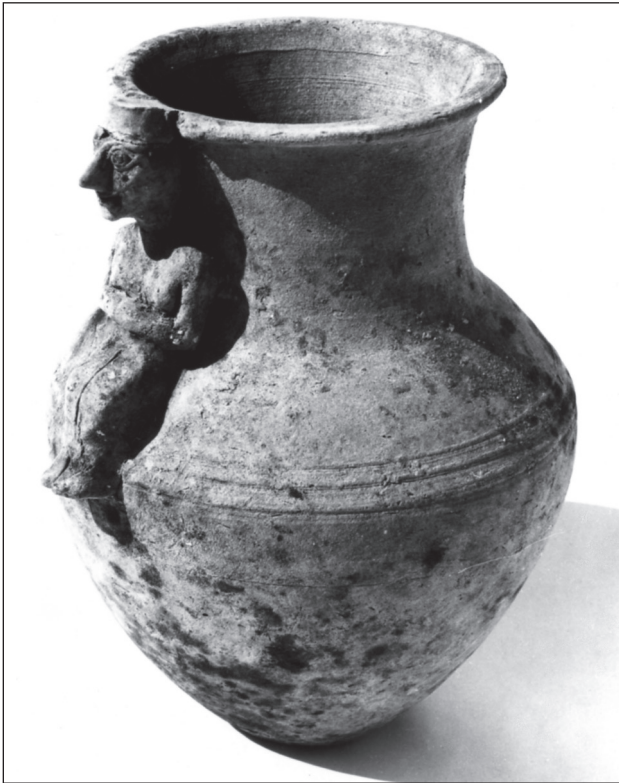


Figure 140: Vessel decorated with seated female figurine (City III).

foothills of the Taurus, demonstrate that vessels circulated, not surprising in a world where development was founded on trade.

For City II the evidence is not as rich as expected, because few domestic levels were found corresponding to the destruction. It is the houses whose existence was abruptly interrupted that usually provide archaeologists with a large quantity of pottery, which sometimes indicates the use of a particular part of the building, or provides information on the activities carried out there. This path cannot be followed at Mari because nothing is known of the material found in the House of the Souk, and although there is mention in the reports of a large quantity of broken pottery in the Red House, a series for the pottery was not established. But this reference is interesting in itself, because it concerns large jars which were clearly placed in the three rooms used for storage; it thus suggests this function. It also suggests that, as the fire was so intense in this house, it was because some of the jars contained inflammable products such as oil.

The study of the pottery is thus not as advanced as could be wished. Nevertheless, thanks to the tombs, although not numerous for City II, series are beginning to be determined which provide a very interesting outline for the pottery of City II. The common pottery is obviously the best represented; there was not a complete break with the pottery of City I, but an evolution which produced shapes that are sometimes quite inelegant (truncated dishes and jugs),



Figure 141: Animal trap (City II).

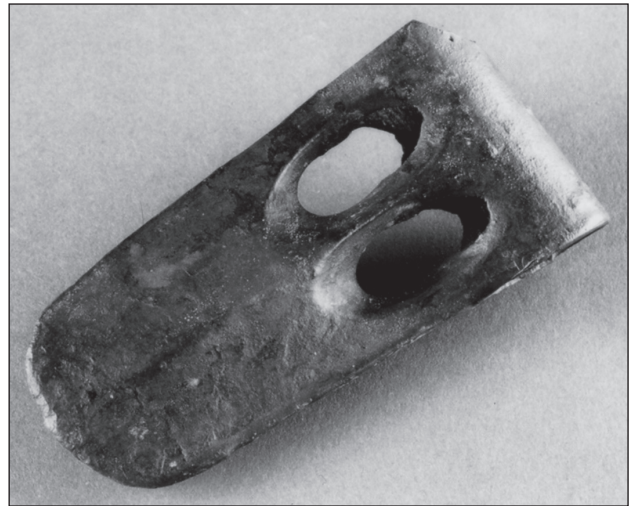


Figure 142: Axe with perforations.

as well as carinated jars, bowls and bottles with tubular spouts. "Metallic" pottery and pottery with red bands are always evidence of relations with upper Mesopotamia, but relations also existed with central Mesopotamia.

It is the tombs that have provided most of the known pottery for City III as, except for excavation area K, no actual habitation levels were found with material in place, and the pottery of the palace has not been studied methodically. It is thus difficult to know whether the known material is representative of the whole production and of everyday use or whether it should be considered to be a category that is specifically funerary. So far the studies of specialists have not pointed to a true specificity for the funerary pottery; this suggests that these examples are probably representative of everyday use. The *Shakkanakku* period produced pottery of good quality, dominated by open shapes and large vessels with globular bodies (fig. 140). Many objects of everyday use were made of fired clay, such as a mongoose trap found in one of the houses (fig. 141).

Copper and bronze objects were present from the



Figure 143: Two toggle-pins with gold rings.



Figure 144: Small oval bowl in bronze with inscription (end of City II).

beginning of the city onward, mainly needles and pins for clothing as well as various tools and knives, found either in the tombs of this period or in the layers of the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct, that is, in the craftsmen's zone that had produced them and where the hearths for metallurgy were found. A series of bronze vessels and tools in various forms comes from tomb 300 (fig. 142).

Metallurgical activity at Mari, an important reason for the first foundation, was also present in City II; clearly this activity also justified the decision for the re-foundation. It is still impossible to evaluate quantitatively the importance of this technology, because bronze objects were rarely found in the houses. They would have been removed by the inhabitants, and objects of everyday use would have been frequently recycled. Aside from foundation deposits, which are very specific and in the form of nails with no use in everyday life, it is mainly in the tombs that copper and bronze objects were found. These consist of weapons (lances, daggers), tools (axes of various types), but also very personal objects such as toggle-pins (fig. 143) for attaching clothing and small sheaths that contained little sticks for the application of cosmetics.

It is rare to find a group of objects that is very different from this everyday material, such as the one found on the surface near the Red House, datable to the period of Akkadian domination. This is an exceptional assemblage, consisting of several inscribed vessels (fig. 144), as well as objects that are rarely found in the usual occupation



Figure 145: Sickles, axe and fish hook in bronze (end of City II).

levels. These include two sickle blades, a wide knife (which could be a type of axe) and a fish hook (fig. 145), as well as a hoe with socket for a haft with a sacred mark (fig. 146), and two objects interpreted as stirrups. The presence of the divine mark on the hoe and the inscriptions on the vessels is evidence that these objects are not ordinary, but come from a religious sector, whether a temple or an administrative centre.

Again it is the tombs that, in the period of the beginning of City III under the *Shakkanakku*, produced associations of objects very similar to those of the previous cities: axes that sometimes have perforations, various blades and knives, lance or javelin points, bowls, nose rings, etc. The exceptional quantity of the bronzes deposited in the *Shakkanakku* tombs is striking, a certain sign of the





Figure 146: Bronze hoe with sacred sign (end of City II).



Figure 147: Stone vessel inscribed with the name of Suwada, cup-bearer of Iku-Shamagan, temple of Ishtar at City II.

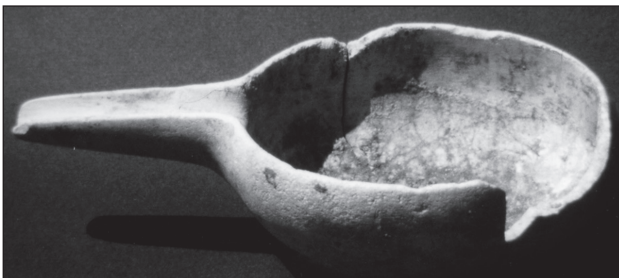


Figure 148: Alabaster vessel with a long spout found in a tomb at City I.

wealth of the city's inhabitants. Paradoxically, the period of the Amorite dynasty, which has provided in its texts essential information on the metallurgy of Mari and on its role in diplomatic relations, has furnished very little archaeological information.

Lithic tools always played an important role. These are first of all present as heavy objects in basalt, mainly for grinding, being fixed querns and saddle querns with a consistent morphology, which renders them non-datable, as they were found in every level. To these are added mortars



Figure 149: Stone vessel, favissa of the temple of Ninhursag (City I).

and pestles, widely used in culinary preparation, as well as turntables in basalt for shaping pottery. Stone vessels are in general categorised as luxury objects, but certain of these appear to have been used in daily life or placed in tombs (figs. 147, 148, 149). Because they are numerous, small tools in knapped stone are worth mentioning, especially as the advent of copper and bronze did not cause them to disappear. In particular, a large number of flint blades were found in every level. In the Palace of City II, several places for flint knapping were found, whose products, micro-burins and micro-drills, were used in particular to engrave shells that became motifs in mosaic panels.

### Importance of economic activities and artisanal production

The most striking aspect of the excavations conducted in recent years at Mari is the revelation of an intensity in the transformation of materials, beginning in City I; there are signs of intense manufacturing activity almost everywhere.

In City I, under the central space of the Sacred Precinct of City II, 4 metres of stratification consisted entirely of a succession of hearths for metallurgy. Hearths for bronze production were also found at other points: practically against the rampart of the city in J-1, established in an available open space, at the level of the levelling of City I at the base of the tombs under the Little Eastern Palace, at the same level under the Red House of City II, as well as in excavation area L at the first level of installation and in the upper levels. One of these hearth areas, associated with complementary installations, appears to have been a true workshop, which makes up to now a dozen occurrences dispersed through the city with two points of strong concentration (under the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct and area L). Crucibles were also found, usually in fragments, as well as tubes for bellows. This activity appears to be so well represented that it suggests that one





Figure 150: Imprint of a whole wheel (beside skeleton of donkey) on the floor of a wheelwright's workshop in City I.

of the primary motivations at the time of foundation was to establish a city for metallurgical production between the Taurus and Babylonia, in order to benefit as much as possible from control of the trade route as well as from the production of metal objects.

There are also countless pottery kilns (area L, under the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct, under and at the foot of the precinct wall near the sector of the temple of Ishtar). As in excavation area L, there are bitumen-covered areas reserved for a specific use, as well as installations that were probably for dyeing. Also to be noted is the “hygienic installation” of the house of level 2 in the sector of the temple of Ishtar.

At the present time, although the proportion of the urban space allocated to artisanal activities cannot be evaluated, it may be stated that most of the surface areas excavated in City I were devoted to them, apparently at the expense of habitation zones; was this simply a chance of excavation? This is improbable, given the dispersion of the evidence found.

Thus it appears that Mari was characterised at the time of its foundation by an economic activity that was not limited to trade, or rather the control of trade, but also to the production of goods. It is easy to understand that copper from the Taurus, perhaps also tin from Kestel/Göltepe, would have provided the raw material for metallurgical activity and that Mari could have become an important

centre that imported these metals and transformed them into weapons and tools; the city would thus have become the northern key point that supplied copper and even bronze objects to Mesopotamia.

Other activities probably arose in connection with this first and fundamental “industry”, possibly the production of certain types of vessels, given the high number of kilns found, as well as the fabrication of certain fabrics and dyeing. Recent excavation has brought to light (excavation area L) a wheelwright's workshop, the earliest known (fig. 150) in the Syro-Mesopotamian world. The importance of this discovery exceeds that of a simple workshop and its tools, because two wheel impressions were found that have enabled definition of the specific technology used to produce the original wheels. Mari was founded initially upon the expansion of urbanisation by water transport, and has also furnished the earliest example of the instrument that enabled the development of transport by land. That this evidence was found in City I, before the reconstruction of City II brought about the second urbanisation period and the widening of Mari's control over regions whose lack of watercourses for transport prevented urban development, is a significant indication of the forces of renewal and of growth that swept through the Near East in the first third of the third millennium.

It also provides new proof that the transformation of the Mesopotamian world between the fifth and the third



Figure 151: Installation for water drainage in a workshop (Palace P-1, City II).

millennium that led to urban civilisation was impelled as much by the expansion of trade as it was by the rise of certain new technologies.

Thus it is a new image of the life of a Mesopotamian city that this City I of Mari presents for the beginning of the third millennium, to the point that it may be considered to be one of the earliest examples of a city with integrated artisanal activities.

Unfortunately, the metallurgical centre of City II has not been found. Nevertheless, it is certain that this activity remained one of the economic backbones of the city. According to certain observations concerning the nature of the soils, it would appear that this activity was transferred to the area of the ring of land situated between the two ramparts in the south-western zone.

In any case artisanal activity is well attested. The palace appears to have been a centre for the fabrication of products of luxury and refinement, such as mosaic panels. Two work areas for lithic tools were found in the palace; pieces that were fabricated in series, in the process of being made or awaiting assembly, were found in the collapse of level P-2. All the quarter west of the main entrance of the palace appears to have been devoted to artisanal activities, judging by fabrication waste, by small fragments of tools and by installations that remain enigmatic, first considered to be toilets, but which would appear rather to be associated with artisanal activity (fig. 151).

The large house in excavation area B (City II), called the House of Artisanal Installations, offers a particularly interesting example of workshops integrated into a building whose morphology is not that of a domestic building. It appears that at least two different activities took place

there: one part could have been for dyeing, the other a centre for bread production on a large scale. The size of the dyeing workshop and of the bread-making area suggests the possibility that only a part of the manufacturing zone has been found, the northern limit having disappeared in the erosion of the edge of the tell; this zone should perhaps be compared with what is known at Ishnun (Tell Asmar) or Tell Beydar for the same period. In any case, it is the entire evaluation of manufacturing work in the middle of the third millennium that is in play in this estimation.

For City III on the other hand, archaeological evidence of artisanal activity is very poorly represented, although the texts provide proof for its presence. Once again, a link between texts and archaeology is missing.

### The intensity of relations and contacts woven by Mari

Although the first city is still poorly known, the conditions for its rise, as we have seen, emphasise the importance of trade as the motive for its foundation. The material recovered certainly points in this direction.

Among the objects discovered in the *favissae* and the tombs, lapis-lazuli and cornelian beads furnish proof for relations with very distant regions such as Afghanistan, as the only relevant lapis-lazuli mines lie in the region of Shortugai in northern Afghanistan. The triton shells buried in the temple of Ninhursag are proof of relations with the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean; their large number, as well as the craftsman's productions that formed the deposit included in the wall of the Very Holy Place, indicate that



regular contact existed between the middle Euphrates valley and the Gulf regions, even though trade may have passed through intermediaries.

Small objects of value were not the only objects traded. In one of the earliest levels of City I, in excavation area B, four very large basalt querns were found on the floor. It is not yet known whether they came from the region of Halabiyé/Zalabiyé, about 180 km upriver from Mari, where an imposing outcrop of basalt was exploited for regional needs and from which came, in the time of Zimri-Lin, the stones intended to serve as betyls; it is also possible that their origin lies in the region of the Khabur where several deposits are known. To judge by their size, these are fixed querns that were ready to be used; they were not in their place of use but appear to be awaiting installation, which suggests that they are a batch that came in this form by boat from their place of production.

In this category of non-precious objects, pottery of exterior origin can be placed, such as the two vessels in *Scarlet Ware* from tomb 300, and the Ninevite V sherds and vessels found several times on the site; they probably served as containers for commodities coming from northern regions and were kept at Mari for their aesthetic or exotic quality, or may have been imported for both reasons.

But it is probably the metallurgical installations (excavations in the Palace central space of the Sacred Precinct and area L) that have provided the most precious information on the role of Mari in inter-regional trade at the beginning of the third millennium. In fact, Mari possessed none of the raw materials necessary for metallurgy – all had to be imported. Copper came from the Taurus through the Khabur plain; it was long thought that the tin necessary for producing bronze came from Iran, considered to be the only producer; but a tin mine has recently been discovered in Anatolia at Kestel/Göltepe, a site south of Kültepe and quite close to the Euphrates, which could have served as a

supply route. It is possible that arsenic found in the northern mountains of Anatolia could have been used in alloys, but this will have to be determined by analysis. These metals came to Mari not only in a relatively pure state, but also in the form of ore, and it is possible that the charcoal necessary for the various operations of refining, alloying and fusion for casting came on the same supply routes, as the valley offered no such resource. Mari clearly acted as a re-distributor of finished products, thus demonstrating the importance of this trade and the role the city played in northern Mesopotamia.

During the campaign of 2002, excavation area L produced an impression of a wooden cart wheel that had been coated in bitumen, next to the skeleton of a donkey (fig. 150); this is the earliest known evidence for a full wheel found on an excavation in Mesopotamia. The fact that it is associated with a donkey does not indicate the use of this wheel on a cart harnessed to a donkey, as it is a single wheel, found next to a wheelwright's tool, and in a room in which a harnessed donkey would not have been used or even been able to enter. The importance of this discovery is obvious.

The number and diversity of the products that were traded in the period of the first city, in spite of the fact that such a small surface has been excavated, are indicative of the fundamental function of the city and of the role of commerce in the Syro-Mesopotamian basin at the beginning of the third millennium.

Study of the material recovered in the different levels of City II and City III leads to the same conclusion: the city of Mari, established in a desert environment without any raw materials, could have existed only as a control centre of a commercial crossroads; this activity was exceptionally intense, and Mari benefitted from its position to develop artisanal activities based on the importation of raw materials.



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## X. Court art, sacred art, popular art

### Art in the period of City I

Not enough surface area has been excavated at Mari to reveal the centres, whether palaces or temples, in which works of art were produced. In general it was in the levels of City II, where such objects were probably preserved because of their antiquity, that objects have been found which represent the art produced at Mari.

A surprising collection of some sixty stone vessels in all sizes, of various types and of varied geological origin (alabaster, limestone...), mostly complete but with their rims usually chipped, was found at the bottom of a *favissa* situated in the Very Holy Place of the temple of Ninhursag of City II. Dating these vessels is difficult, but on the whole they appear to belong more to the beginning than to the middle of the third millennium (fig. 149). With these vases were 26 magnificent shells – cowries,

bivalves of Cardium type, cones, very large tritons with or without spikes; some had been cut through lengthwise in order to serve as recipients, and one of the tritons had even been cleverly worked in order that one of the spikes could be used as a spout, while at the other end a second spout was similarly created following the natural curve (fig. 152). Although it is difficult to date these objects without resorting to destructive analyses, their association with the stone vessels should enable a chronological connection to be made. They would probably have been used as recipients for ritual libations. Among them was a very beautiful alabaster head of a ram that would have also served as a recipient (fig. 153).

A second *favissa* from the same Very Holy Place produced, along with a disparate material composed of sherds that had been incrustated, various beads and

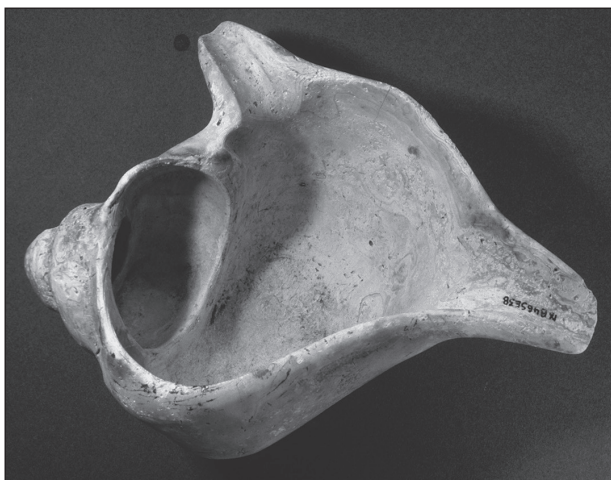


Figure 152: Shell cut into the shape of a recipient with two spouts for libation, *favissa* of the temple of Ninhursag (City I).

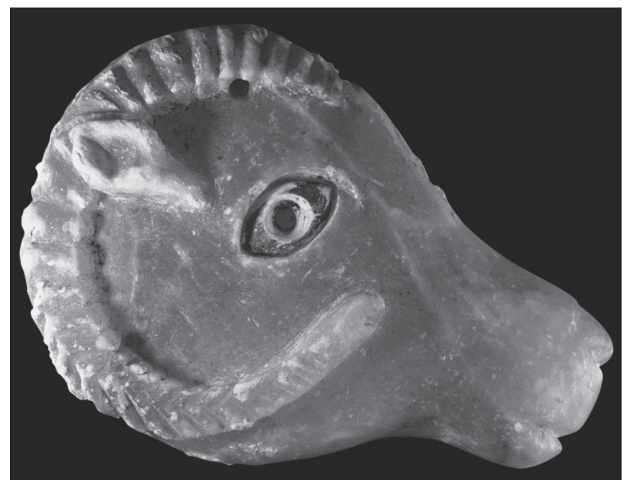


Figure 153: Head of a sheep in alabaster, *favissa* of the temple of Ninhursag (City I).

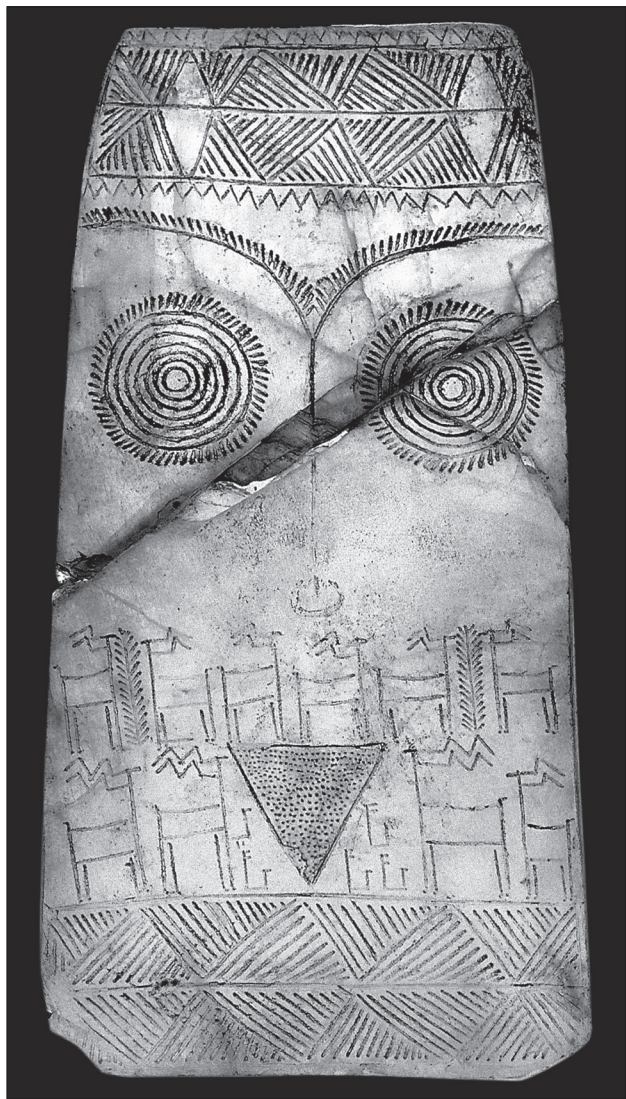


Figure 154: Gypsum stele with eyes, favissa of the temple of Ninhursag (end of City I).

elements of incrustation, a small stele in gypsum that is quite exceptional (fig. 154).

Found practically complete, but in three pieces after being broken and repaired with bitumen in ancient times, it is approximately rectangular in shape. Its dimensions, 35 cm × 17.5 cm × 3 cm, clearly express the taste of Near Eastern peoples, throughout their long history, for regular rhythms and lines, as the design of the stele is contained in two squares 17.5 cm per side, the latter representing the value of its base; 35 cm is a value hardly longer than the average value attributed to a foot, which is 33 cm. So this may be an object whose dimensions have been dictated by a cubit of 52.5 cm (rather than 49.5 cm), as a foot represents 2/3 of a cubit.

It is of great iconographic value; at the top and at the base is a double row of alternating hatched triangles (the motif is bordered at the top by two broken lines), in the upper half are two round eyes formed of seven concentric circles, surrounded by a circle of hatching, above which are arched

eyebrows joined in one descending line that represents the nose, whose base is outlined as an incomplete ellipse. In the lower half is a triangle pointed downward and filled with dots, that could symbolise female genitals; above is a row of horned animals of ibex type in opposing groups either side of tall plants. On each side of the triangle are other pairs of ibex and three filiform motifs that can be recognised as water birds of different types.

These motifs and their organisation are also to be found in City II at its beginnings as well as in City I. The wide staring eyes are like those of the famous couple from Tell Asmar (Early Dynasty II or III), but also like those of the eye idols of Tell Brak. The Ninevite V pottery also offers close parallels with the hatched triangle motifs, in the depiction of the horns of the animals and the birds. Moreover, the assemblage of horned animals with water birds and the manner of lining them up perfectly characterise this period. Thus, for unknown reasons, an object dated to the Nineveh V period, therefore to City I, was carefully preserved for several centuries, or more probably found in a later period and deposited in a *favissa*, because it was recognised as a sacred object.

Fragments of similar steles were found at Mari in the temple of Ishtar and at Assur. Thus this piece is not unique, but it does offer an example of organisation that is striking, with clear individual symbols, even though their association is not obvious. The lower half presents two principles, the triangle as a female symbol and the male goats as a male principle, whose association appears natural; but what do the birds represent? And why is there a rudimentary plant between two opposing male goats? Although this theme is well known in Near Eastern iconography of the historical period, it was new in this period and its significance in this case is not clear. The large staring eyes of the upper half, quite characteristic of northern Mesopotamia in the first half of the third millennium, are found elsewhere and in other periods; could it express a divine gaze protecting the forces of reproduction? Do the double bands of inversed chevrons have a figurative meaning (head hair and beard?), or a symbolic one (sky above and lower world below)? The simplest explanation would appear to lie in the action of a divinity, symbolised by the eyes, on the forces of life.

Carved in a soft green translucent stone, a tiny “eye idol”, that was part of a votive deposit composed mainly of objects in shell placed between the brick courses during the construction of the walls of the very Holy Place of the temple of Ninhursag, takes us back again to the end of the fourth millennium or the beginning of the third millennium.

The vessels, the shells, the stele, the tiny idol and the threshold slab of the temple of Ninni-zaza form an ample harvest of objects from the first city, found in the temples of the second. Did this indicate religious conservatism? Future excavations may provide an answer, but given the abandonment of the city at the end of this first period, the fact that objects found in the ruins during the construction of the second city were carefully preserved in sacred pits is worthy of consideration.



Popular art is not well represented, but was certainly found in levels of City I; it is represented more by modelled animal figurines – horned animals, equines with harness vestiges, sheep (?) – than by human figurines, which are usually very crude. A fragmentary chariot mounted on little wheels is a good example.

## Art in the period of City II

Because research in City II was concentrated in the palaces and temples, the recovery of works of art was particularly rich in two main categories, statuary and mosaic panels, as well as reliefs, small carved objects and jewellery; examples of popular art are the most rare.

### *Statues*

Two main deposits produced most of the statues, the temple of Ishtar excavated before the war and the two temples of Ninni-zaza and Ishtar at Mari, studied in 1952-53. Some complementary finds come from other temples or from the Palace. Among the most well-known pieces is Ishgi-Mari (previously read as Lamgi-Mari), the king that enabled the identification of the site (fig. 155), Ebih-II the superintendent (fig. 156), Ur-Nanshe the singer (fig. 157), Shibum, and the Man of Mari, one of the most striking heads that have been found (fig. 158). The miller Idi-Narum (fig. 159) and the fine head of a bearded worshipper (fig. 160) may be included here.

It appears that most of the fragments were recovered in the last or next-to-last occupation level, but their exact positions are often imprecise and it is not certain that all were found on the same floor. Because of its nature, this evidence does not allow a thorough study of stylistic development; it is not certain that such an approach is possible at Mari, or elsewhere for that matter, as long as the relation between the stratigraphy and the historical chronology is so uncertain. It is an error to define styles independently of stratigraphy, to define an artistic development and then use this to define archaeological levels. Different styles can be contemporary and reflect regional particularities or survivals.

Most of the statuettes found were sculpted in a local gypseous stone, extracted from homogenous seams without faults, these being alabaster, a variety of high-quality gypsum, as well as breccias and calcareous stone. Ivory and metal were also employed, as well as wood, which has disappeared but whose existence is defined by inlaid elements or veneering in gold, silver or ivory. These composite statuettes may represent the main part of the production.

There is great variety in the standards used for the statues. Their height varies from ten centimetres to about 1.60 m, although the reasons for such choices are not known. Three attitudes are dominant: standing and immobile (juxtaposed feet), standing and walking (feet staggered on the base) and seated. Should a particular



Figure 155: *Ishgi-Mari, king of Mari, temple of Ishtar (City II).*

meaning be attributed to these three postures? The contrast is strong between the standing and the seated positions, but what meaning should be given when the position of the hands indicates worship? The sculptors attempted, often with difficulty, to give the different parts of the human body a place within space. In the large blocks in which arms and legs are sometimes hardly visible, they sometimes sought to lighten the effect by detaching the arms from the chest and separating the feet and legs from the whole. But for many statues the sculptor thought it necessary to retain an element of the stone block next to the legs or solidly bound to them in order to reinforce the base, but also the mass and thus the stability of the statue. This was because the stone itself was not very resistant,



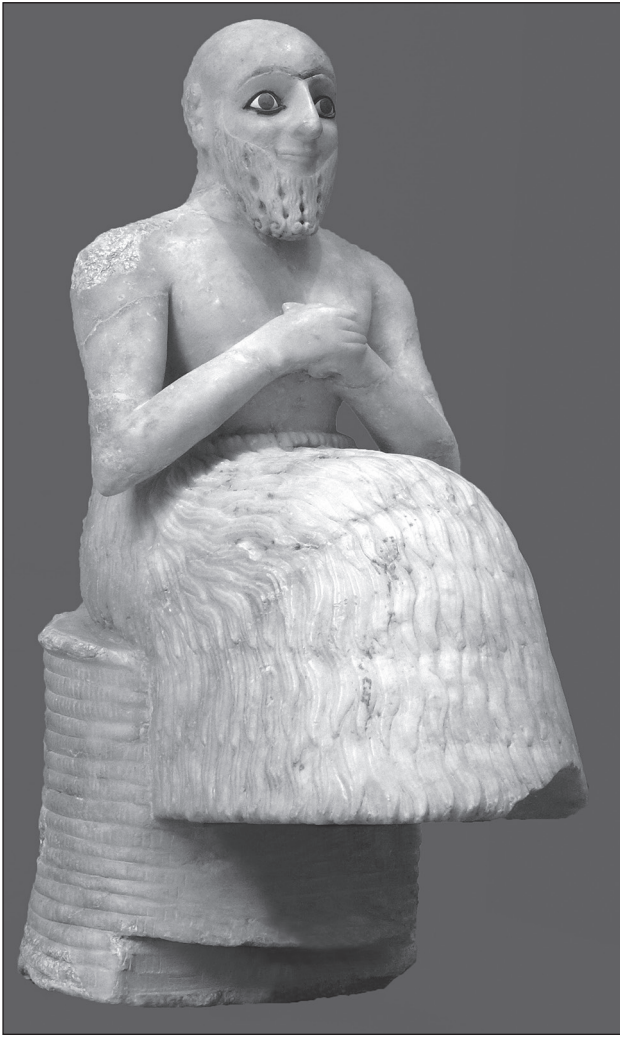


Figure 156: Ebih II, superintendant of Mari, temple of Ishtar (City II).



Figure 157: Ur-Nanshe the singer, temple of Ninni-zaza (City II).

and if the legs alone ensured balance on a narrow base, the instability of the statue would have been great, and so would its fragility. Indeed, this was perhaps the reason that led certain sculptors, even the most skilful, to choose, at least in certain cases, the seated position, which provided a wide base that did not risk the less stable balance of the vertical position.

These figures can be of men or women, but women are more often depicted in the seated position. The seat can appear in various forms, usually without a back, being more a stool than a throne. It also exists with bull hooves, sometimes surmounted by an entire animal body, which gives it particular importance; sometimes it is a simple cube without decorative elements. The seat of Ebih-II could depict basketwork, and that of Ur-Nanshe resembles a simple low cushion which requires the singer to cross his legs and to be close to a squatting position, perhaps easier for playing his lyre (harp?).

The hands often express the action, joined in front of the chest for prayer, worship or veneration, in an apparently



Figure 158: Head of the Man of Mari, temple of Ninni-zaza (City II).

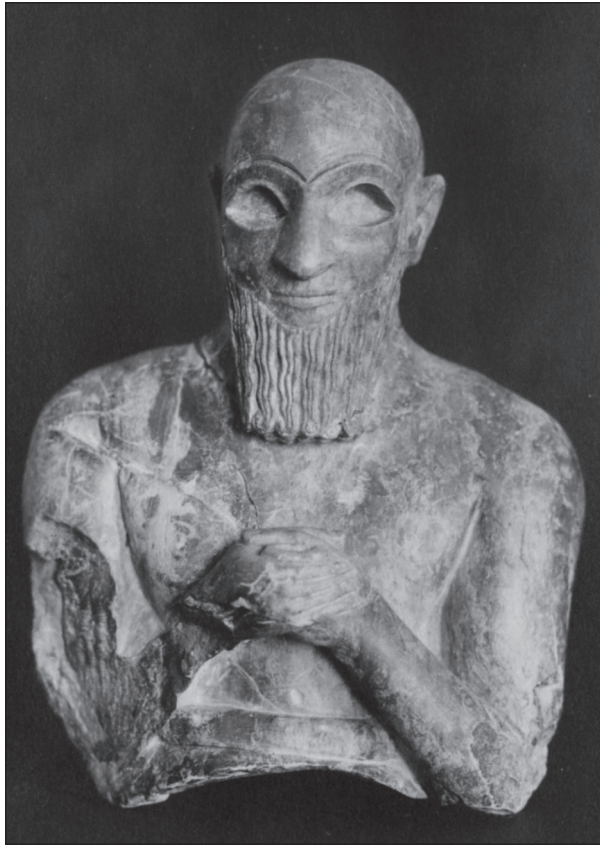


Figure 159: The miller Idi-narum, temple of Ishtar (City II).

passive attitude, which in a religious sense is a voluntary act. An object is sometimes held in the hands, a branch of dates, a lyre or harp, a young ram destined for sacrifice.

The majority of these personages at Mari wear the *kaunakès*, a mysterious garment made of long overlapping strips of material in rows (wool cloth, sheepskin, felt?); more rarely they wear an apparently smooth material, probably a textile, which envelops the entire body or just its lower part, ending with a row of *kanaukès* strips or with fringes.

The study of the sanctuaries has already enabled determination of the spots where the statues were placed, on benches along the walls or in the Very Holy Place, or in a room that probably annexed it (fig. 86). Many appear to have been recovered in the central spaces, that is, generally in the Holy Place, but it is not certain whether they were intentionally placed there, as they are always broken as a result of intentional destruction.

For the period of the Early Dynasties, no trace has been found of statues placed anywhere other than within temples. Not until the phase of the Anonymous Temples, that is, the Akkadian period, were statues placed in front of the temple against the façade. This was an important innovation, as the figure could no longer represent a worshipper in adoration, but in all likelihood a divinity who was not the object of worship but who participated in the sacred nature of the sanctuary.

As to whether the sculptors had the capacity to create



Figure 160: Head of bearded worshipper, temple of Ninni-zaza (City II).

true portraits, portraits did exist, although this was not the primary intent of the sculptor. It is true that certain statuettes present features that appear to be repetitive and thus stereotyped, but others stress individual aspects, which are sometimes very strong and could only have come from observation; the Man of Mari is in this category.

Mari appears to have been a centre of the highest importance, well integrated into trends in the art of stone statuary in the third millennium, but it also produced a series of *chefs-d'oeuvre* which are unique. The capital of the middle valley of the Euphrates was a primary centre of artistic creation in the Near East.

### Mosaic panels

The second domain in which Mari excelled was the fabrication of mosaic panels, which were highly favoured during the Archaic Dynasty throughout the Syro-Mesopotamian basin (Fig. 161). However, these works were found in the form of thousands of fragments, not complete like the panel at Ur. None are intact and three or four joined elements constitute the best evidence found.

At Mari, all the centres with a religious purpose have produced mosaics. The temple of Ishtar provided the first examples of scenes of war, that of NINHURSAG offering-bearers. The temple of Shamash produced mosaics depicting





Figure 161: Shell figure of warrior with adze, intended for mosaic panel (City II).

equine animals, seated personages, bull immolation and acts of worship in which women figure. The sector of the priests between the temple of the Massif Rouge and the palace produced religious scenes, bearers of fish and of *situlae*. The temples of Nini-zaza and Ishtarat produced scenes of war and banqueting, while the first deposit from the Sacred Precinct, in the northern corridor, depicted captives, and the second, in Space 4, horses, elements of chariots and warriors.

The latter deposit (palace P-2) does not come from the breakup and dispersion of a mosaic panel after collapse or

destruction; it is probably a collection of pieces kept “in reserve”, intended for the fabrication of one or more panels (Fig. 162). This discovery provides precious information on the technical aspects of this type of object and complements the information gleaned from the flint-knapping workshop that prepared the micro-burins intended to engrave motifs on shell elements.

At Mari, the themes are those encountered traditionally and which the monument of Ur has made famous: scenes of war, or rather victory, and scenes of banqueting, processions of offering-bearers and tribute-bearers. But other subjects belong more specifically to the repertoire at Mari, with a great variety of motifs representing everyday life, as well as religious life with scenes of worship and of sacrifice.

What purpose did these mosaic panels serve? Contrary to what has sometimes been advanced, they do not evoke historical events. The repetitive nature of the subjects illustrates this. Found in buildings related to the religious domain, usually temples, these scenes would have had a significance related to fundamental beliefs and would have referred to elements of myths related to religious practice. Their presence, whether in a temple or not, could have been intended for apotropaic or simply magical purposes.

They sometimes originate from the upper storey (south quarter of palace P-2, administrative centre of the High Priest), which even though related to a temple, did not house places of worship. Thus it is difficult to see them as simple religious objects; the presence of such panels in reception halls or in tombs, as at Ur, although indicative of a link to religion, would probably mean that they were not sacred objects.

### Relief

The art of relief, so characteristic of the period of the Early Dynasties in central and southern Mesopotamia and in the Diyala region in the form of votive plaques (sometimes called New Year plaques), maces and stone recipients, is quite rare at Mari. Of the 21 maces recovered in the temple of Ishtar, only one fragmentary example was decorated with a spread-winged eagle.

The interesting evidence is quickly surveyed: two fragments of votive plaques from the temple of Ishtar with a figure holding a branch, six fragments of a very beautiful square plaque divided into 9 regular squares and possibly pierced in the centre, which came from the fill between P-1 and P-2, fragments of figures profiled left or right, the head and neck not joined, often bearded, wearing a toque.

On the other hand, vessels with relief are well represented: steatite vessels imported from Iran or Oman, a sign of the role of Mari in long-distance international trade as well as an indication of the taste of the inhabitants for objects of quality and value. There are vessels of decorated alabaster, of which several examples from the temple of Ishtar are quite remarkable, and a vessel fragment decorated with a lion-headed eagle with outspread wings.



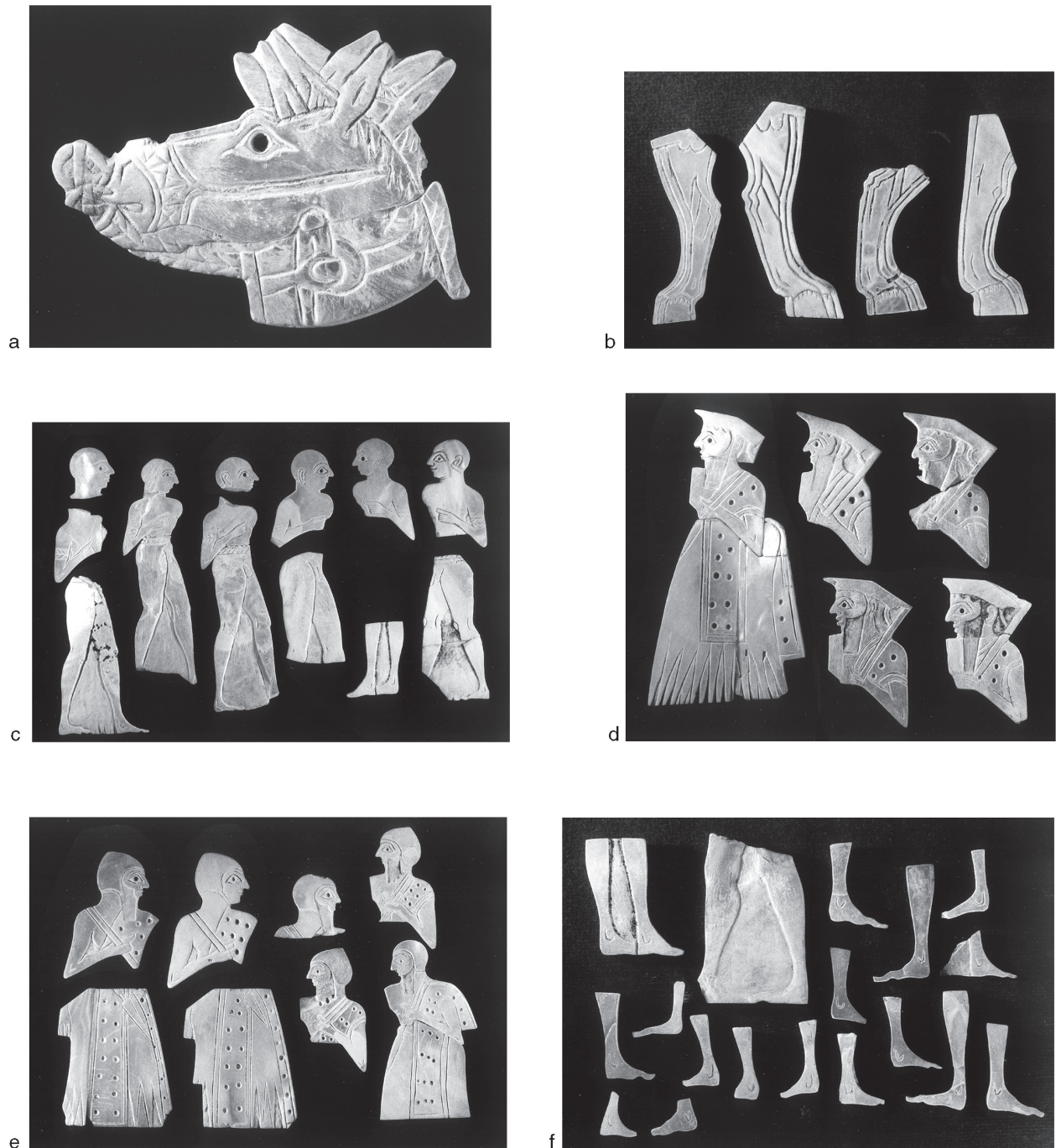


Figure 162: Shell figures intended for mosaic panels from a workshop in the palace of City II.

### **Glyptic art**

A very beautiful plaque engraved in gypsum of a battle scene demonstrates the perfection of the engraver's art in this period (Fig. 163). However, there is in glyptic art a curious paucity of production as, although not negligible, the evidence is not very rich and appears to be unexceptional and of average quality on the whole; this is perhaps the result of excavations more focused on the sacred quarters than on the residential areas. According to Pierre Amiet and Dominique Beyer, these are imported

objects, although recent evidence suggests that workshops for this period at Mari could have existed (figs. 164, 165).

Coming from workshops that were probably exterior to Mari, the fourteen cylinder seals from the so-called Treasure of Ur are related to the series of the First Dynasty of Ur, with banquet scenes, animal combat, human processions, mythological and religious scenes. It is certain that they are of Mesopotamian origin, but it is not sure that they came from the great southern capital, as none reproduces exactly a model from Ur.

The superb discovery of fragments of seal impressions, upon which the seal of Ishqi-Mari (alias Lamgi-Mari) had been several times rolled, is in the same tradition; the themes are those of the First Dynasty of Ur and there are many similarities with the “Standard of Ur”. But although the inspiration came from not far away, the truly Akkadian

features, according to Dominique Beyer, indicate an originality belonging to Mari and put into question certain stylistic relationships.

### *Jewellery and bronze statuette*

A very fine collection of jewellery was found in the so-called Treasure of Ur: two pairs of spiralled bracelets (one silver, the other copper); eight toggle-pins with bulging head, truncated or flat and pierced with an eye, in gold, silver or bronze and sometimes with an ivory head; spherical or truncated gold beads, some with flanges; a tapered and ribbed lapis-lazuli bead, the ends set with gold; beads in lapis-lazuli and cornelian; six lapis-lazuli amulets crudely decorated with a human figure, possibly female, and three animals, ram, rat (?) and hedgehog; a long fusiform lapis-lazuli bead engraved with an inscription; a pendant made of two circles juxtaposed and soldered to each other, in gold, lapis-lazuli and silver, each circle surmounted by an element for suspension; a small wheel in silver; a pectoral ornament in the form of a lion-headed eagle (fig. 166). The latter object is the most impressive and perhaps the most interesting; cut and engraved in a block of lapis, the head and the feathers in gold on bitumen, it is identified with Anzu (IM.DUGUD). A naked female figure representing a goddess driving a chariot was found in the same “treasure” (fig. 167).

### *Popular art*

Popular art is not well represented, probably because of insufficient exploration of the domestic quarters. A few crude animal figurines were found scattered in the habitation zones around the Souk, in excavation zone F and in the sector of the Red House as well as in the surface layers.

### *Conclusion*

Two factors have contributed to the particular standing



Figure 163: Gypsum plaque engraved with war scene: soldiers attacking the wall of a city (City II).



Figure 164: Mould made from Akkadian cylinder seal with the name of NAM-ZI, tamer of animals (end of City II).





Figure 165: Mould made from cylinder seal with two levels, banquet scene and combat scene between men and animals (City II).



Figure 166: Imdugud, pendant in lapis lazuli and gold.

of Mari in the realm of art: its wealth and its geographic position. For statuary, the volume of production as much as the diversity of inspiration, probably a reflection of different workshops as well as of the period, demonstrate that the means were not lacking at Mari. This is all the more striking in view of the enormous quantities of bronze and copper placed in the foundation deposits. No other Syro-Mesopotamian city has produced so many sculpted works or so many mosaics.

### **Art in the period of the *Shakkanakku* (beginning of City III)**

Because this period continued for a long time without any significant break such as destruction or fire, and merges with that of the Amorite dynasty, there is no level that could contain works of art abandoned soon after fabrication. The moments of creation and the stages of development

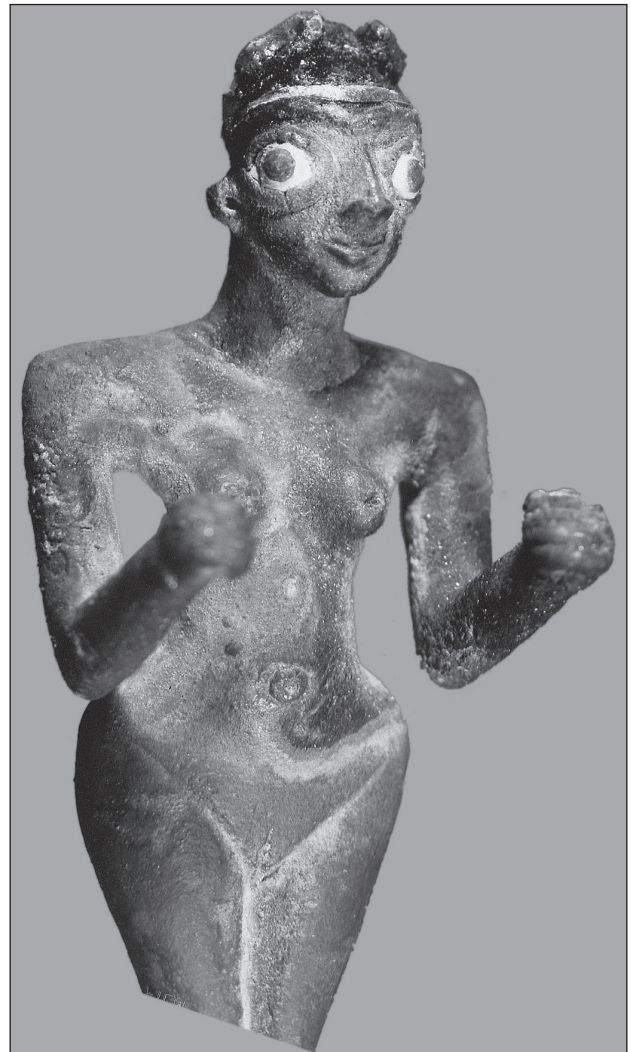


Figure 167: Small nude goddess figure as charioteer; from so-called "Treasure of Ur" (City II).

of production are masked, and most of the objects have disappeared, except for a few.

### ***Ishtar chapel painting***

The painting from the chapel of Ishtar (Space 132) in the Great Royal Palace was discovered in many fragments in



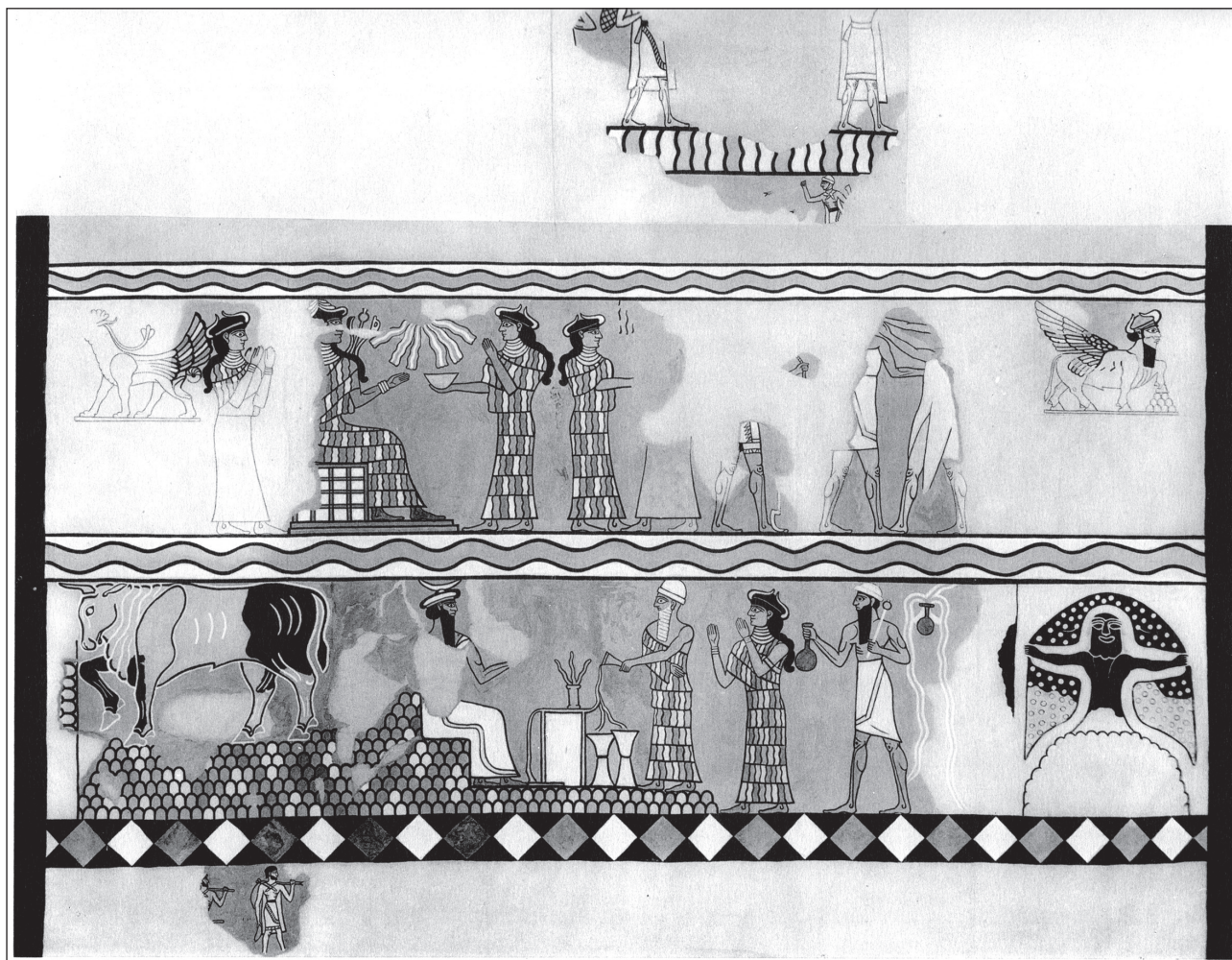


Figure 168: Painting in the sanctuary of Ishtar, Space 132 (City III).

the collapse at the foot of the western wall. It probably dates, according to stylistic and architectural data, to the time of the construction of the palace, that is, about 2000 BC. It was situated at a height of more than 2 m above a blocked-up door.

Reconstructed based on a copy of the fragments, the painting in the state presented cannot be considered to be certain and must be taken for what it is, an approach that is acceptable in a general sense. The reconstruction proposes five registers, two major registers one above the other (height 65 cm each), two minor registers (height about 25 cm each) which frame the first group, and at the top, a final register of average size (height about 50 cm). Separation bands with geometric motifs, lozenges of alternate colours or undulating horizontal lines, distinctly separate the registers (fig. 168).

Two major scenes command attention: Ishtar enthroned in a presentation scene in the middle register and a scene of sacrifice and libation before the god Sin in the large lower register. Other scenes are quite difficult to explain, such as the winged bull and the griffin in the lower register (have they been properly placed in the reconstruction?),

offering bearers (register 1) and fishes (register 5), a warrior pierced by arrows (or perhaps brandishing a javelin?), an enigmatic black figure seen from the front against a starry background, for which there is no comparison and which requires great caution in any interpretation, although its existence is certain.

The two scenes, offerings to Ishtar and libation/sacrifice to a divinity on the mountain, naturally have their place in a chapel. The other scenes, fragmentary and with uncertain placement in the composition, can be explained in such a context, but sometimes also appear quite strange.

### Sculpture

Some complete examples of sculpture have been preserved and many fragments, as well as the bases of statues – a novelty for the period? – come from the ruined monuments of the temple zone.

The theme of the lamb bearer (fig. 169), already present in the mosaic panels of City II, appears in the form of two small statuettes, quite similar and characteristic of traditions of the end of the Akkadian period and the beginning of the





Figure 169: Lamb bearer, head missing (beginning of City III).

*Shakkanakku* period. Thus the break observed between the two cities in a number of domains is not total and some traditions persisted in spite of the changes.

Ishtup-Ilum is the first in the series of the *Shakkanakku* to whom a face can be attributed (fig. 170). The statue had fallen on the floor of the Throne Room at the foot of the stairway of tribune 66, and had probably served as a reference to the Amorite dynasty in a kind of filiation with the *Shakkanakku* dynasty. 1.52 m high, carved in dark basalt, the personage is identified by an inscription, "Ishtup-Ilum, *Shakkanakku* of Mari" on the right shoulder. The figure is standing, feet together, hands joined against the stomach, and is strongly muscled. He wears a round cap with a headband and is dressed in a robe that lies flat beneath his chest, part of the robe lying over the left shoulder and dropping to the base, where the edge is fringed. The eyes are large, well-carved, the nose hammered in the usual way, the lips tight and the mouth hard. A straight beard consisting of long undulating strands with curly ends descends to the middle of the chest, while a moustache covers the upper lip, an innovation in comparison with the statues of City II.

This figure presents a hard, austere attitude, which probably well reflects the personality depicted by the sculptor's chisel.

The statuette of Iddin-Ilum (fig. 171) illustrates another trend in the art of this period. Its remaining height is 41.5 cm, and in the absence of a face which might have



Figure 170: Ishtup-Ilum, *Shakkanakku* of Mari (City III).

expressed something else, this statuette gives an impression of finesse and elegance; had the canon changed or does Iddin-Ilum present morphological features quite different from those of his ancestor? The robe is much more complex, wrapped around the body and passing over the left shoulder to cover the back while a wide fringe descends from the right shoulder across the front. What remains of the beard falls in long straight twisted locks that end in curls symmetrically placed in relation to the central line.

The statue of Puzur Eshtar was discovered at Babylon by Koldwey; however, there is no doubt that it comes from



Figure 171: Iddin-Ilum, Shakkanakku of Mari (City III).

Mari, as its features belong to Iddin-Ilum. 1.75 m high, it represents the *Shakkanakku* in the usual attitude, standing, hands joined on the chest. An ample garment with fringes, wrapped around the body twice, leaves the right shoulder exposed and passes above the left shoulder to descend in front. The figure has a moustache and a fine curly beard with twisted locks that come together in a point in the middle of the chest. Grandeur and serenity characterise the personage. A surprising feature: the usual headdress possesses a row of horns, which bestows a divine character upon the figure. This wish to render divine is exceptional at Mari (but not at Ur).

The head of a statue called the warrior with chinstrap, carved with great finesse, was found lying on the steps of the stairway leading to the sanctuary of the palace (fig. 172).



Figure 172: Head of warrior with chin strap (City III).



Figure 173: Bronze lion protome from the temple of Lions (City III).

With four examples of statues that are similar but not identical, relatively spaced out in time, it is difficult to imagine that there was not a permanent workshop at Mari, one that would appear to have been a true centre of production.

### *Lion protomes*

The two lion protomes in bronze (fig. 173) from the temple of Lions (also called the temple of the King of the Land) are unique pieces. On a wooden core, the animal was shaped using copper sheet attached with nails; set on a platform, they projected from the wall at the mid-point of the body with the forward part placed on a base, the paw slightly raised as though at the start of movement. They are not resting as has been thought but alert and ready to pounce. The animal is thus depicted by the artist in a particular action, and the attitude shows precision of



observation, analysis of movement and an acute perception of the animal. With these two lions, Mari provides us with an excellent illustration of the sensitivity and high technical ability of Near Eastern sculptors in relation to the animal world.

### ***Glyptic art***

In glyptic art, a marked discontinuity is observed between the end of the Akkadian empire and the beginning of the following period. Some very interesting evidence illustrates the end of City II and the beginning of City III, but in the course of the twenty-second century a change occurred in the repertory of cylinder-seals; mythological scenes become more and more rare, while presentation scenes become more and more current, to the point of characterising the periods that followed. For quite a long period, the collection of cylinder-seals or impressions found in the excavations was quite limited. But here and there certain paths of originality in this art at Mari may be observed, and in spite of the general poverty of evidence, this does confirm the importance of this period at Mari.

### ***Popular art***

Evidence for popular art has come to us in the form of figurines and plaques whose study is possible when they are well-stratified, but when no house is found, the floors in place are extremely rare and the archaeological layers are mixed for various reasons, it is difficult to attribute this or that figurine to one particular period rather than another. At Mari it would appear for the moment difficult to define figurines characteristic of the period of the *Shakkanakku* as opposed to that of the Amorite dynasty, except for one or two exceptions. The best-known type, a nude female figurine, which could date to the beginning of the second millennium, presents certain affinities with the Syrian production. Other examples, figurines that are vigorously masculine or animals such as equids or sheep, sometimes also toys, illustrate a real variety of production.

In the realm of art, City III of the *Shakkanakku* was not unworthy of City II.

### **Art in the period of the Amorite dynasty**

It was the destruction of the palace by Hammurabi that lifted the veil from the realm of art and provided us with major, if not unique, works of this period. Through the discoveries made in this palace, not only was Mari illuminated, but the entire period of the First Empire of Babylon as well.

### ***Mural painting***

The existence of Near Eastern mural painting was revealed at the palace of Mari. Besides the wall composition in the

chapel of Ishtar (see above), two other paintings were found: that of the southern façade that continues slightly on the western and eastern sides of courtyard 106, and that of the private apartments of the king. The first painting, 3 m long by 2.50 m high, starting at a height of 3.50 m (the subject of a new study in progress), depicts scenes of sacrifice and walking men. The second, 14.80 m long and 3.50 m high, dates to the period of the domination of Samsi-Addu and depicts the builder-king, the king mastering a lion, the conquering king treading on his fallen enemies or receiving tribute, that is, themes that were to be present a millennium later in the reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian palaces.

### ***Painting of the Investiture***

These grand compositions, that also decorated other quarters of the palace, contributed to the fame of the palace of Mari. But the most famous is the Painting of the Investiture, a true tableau 2.50 m long and 1.65 m high, set at the height of a man to the right of the door leading to the *papahum* (fig. 174). Two opposing panels frame two superimposed registers, placed at the centre of the lower part of the composition. The two lateral panels are symmetrical: from the exterior end, first the goddess *Lama* with raised hands, turned towards the centre of the painting, ensures protection; then a very realistic date palm is depicted from which two men climbing on either side of the trunk gather clusters of dates, while above the fronds a bird spreads its wings; then fabulous animals are superimposed in three registers; finally, there is a very stylised tree. The middle panel is divided into two superimposed registers: in the lower level, two goddesses hold a vessel from which spurt four streams of water containing fish that flow through the field before joining the ground. In the upper level a scene of encounter is depicted in which the king, followed by a goddess, is in the presence of the goddess Ishtar, herself followed by two divinities and recognisable by her attributes, who holds out to him the circle and the staff, insignia of power.

This symmetrical composition conceals a science of proportions which is superimposed on the general symmetry. The painting lies exactly in the figure formed by  $A\sqrt{3}$ ,  $A$  representing the value of the short side; this is one of the values that the Mesopotamians used to define an iconographic field or an architectural space. The intersection of the diagonals of the painting pass exactly through the bust of the goddess; in other words the strong point of the composition is the goddess herself, as a true symmetry would have placed the empty space between the goddess and the king at the centre of the tableau.

That the objective of the tableau would have been “a scene of investiture” or more simply “an encounter” between the king and the divinity is imposed by the focusing of attention on this scene. But how are the other elements of the composition to be understood? (fig. 175). The central register which contains the principal scene should be identified with Throne Room 65; the second

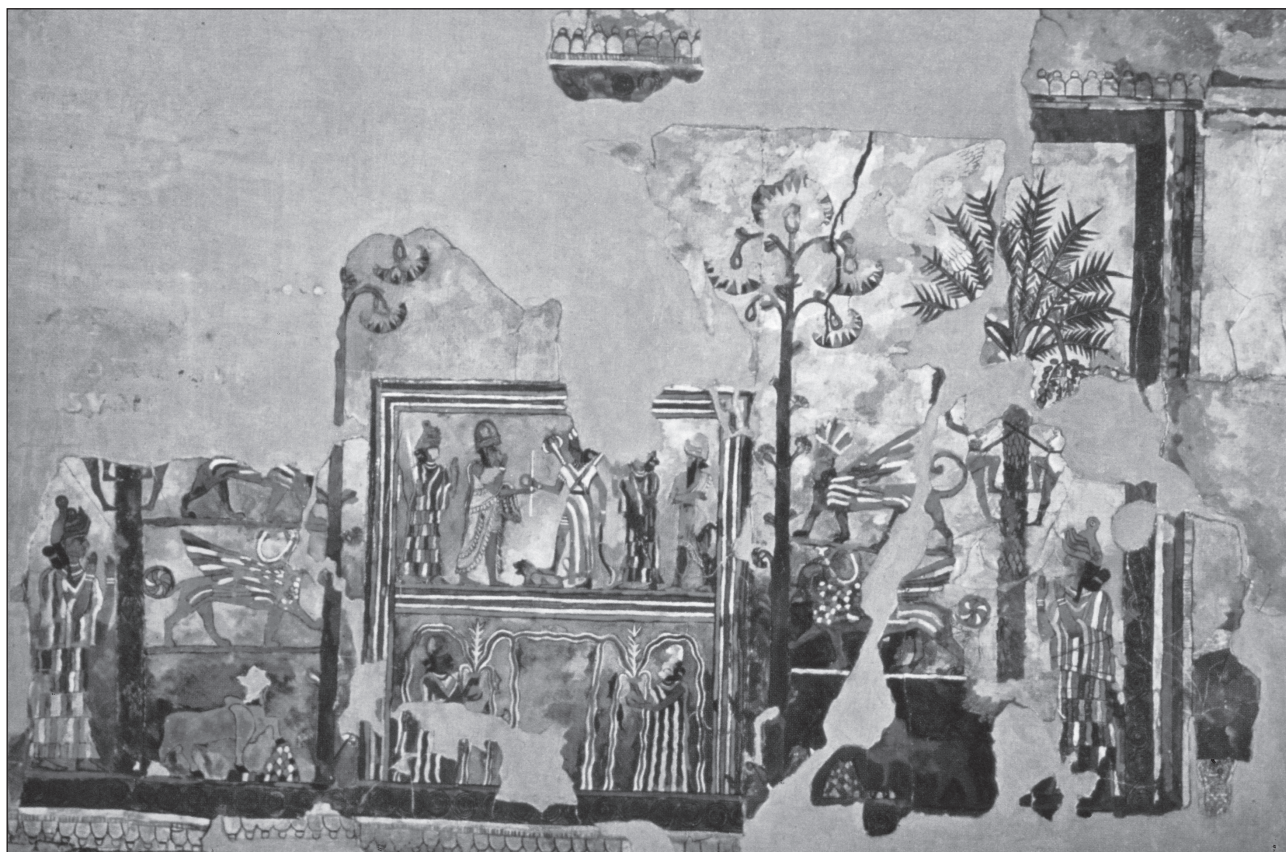


Figure 174: Painting of the Investiture (City III).

register represents room 64, the *papahum*, in which stood the statue of the Goddess of Flowing Waters; the two lateral panels that join at the top like an open sky would have depicted, in split form, courtyard 106 where a date palm stood. What the painter has done is to decompose and then reconstruct the space where the encounter was supposed to have taken place. He shows the scene in its setting and gives the tableau an overall intelligibility, as though it was necessary to present to the spectator entering courtyard 106 the possibility of seeing the whole of space 106-64-65 in one image. Thus the visitor's gaze could take in all of courtyard 106 and its fittings, and continue its path, taking in the palm tree and the other installations. The visitor's gaze could then go directly to room 64 where the statue of the goddess with her vase stood, pass her by and continue into the Throne Room where the encounter between the king and the goddess was taking place.

This Painting of the Investiture is certainly the richest pictorial work of all those brought to light by Near Eastern archaeology so far. It would even appear to be the first modern painted work in history. The sculpted plaque of a goddess called "goddess with a flower" (fig. 176) can be linked to the female figures in the Painting of the Investiture.

### **Goddess of Flowing Waters**

As a sculpture, the statue of the Goddess of Flowing Waters, although she was of lower rank (only one row of horns), is exceptionally successful (fig. 177). She stood on the podium of the *papahum*, dressed in a long robe with close-fitting flounces, on which are engraved trickles of water as well as fish. Large locks of hair fall upon her shoulders and a chignon is coiled at the neck; an imposing necklace decorates the neck and chest and requires a counterweight down the back. The goddess holds a vessel against her abdomen, its opening inclined outward; an internal perforation links it to the base of the statue. The accuracy of the proportions, the delicacy of the details and the equilibrium of the posture confer great harmony upon this statue. Serenity emanates from the contours of the face, the gentleness of the shapes and the rather enigmatic smile, which perhaps expresses satisfaction at being she who brings water, the source of life.

### **Glyptic art**

Thanks to jar stoppers, impressed seals and tablet envelopes, glyptic art is quite well represented, but relatively few cylinder seals have been found in the palace. No master-work stands out in this group.



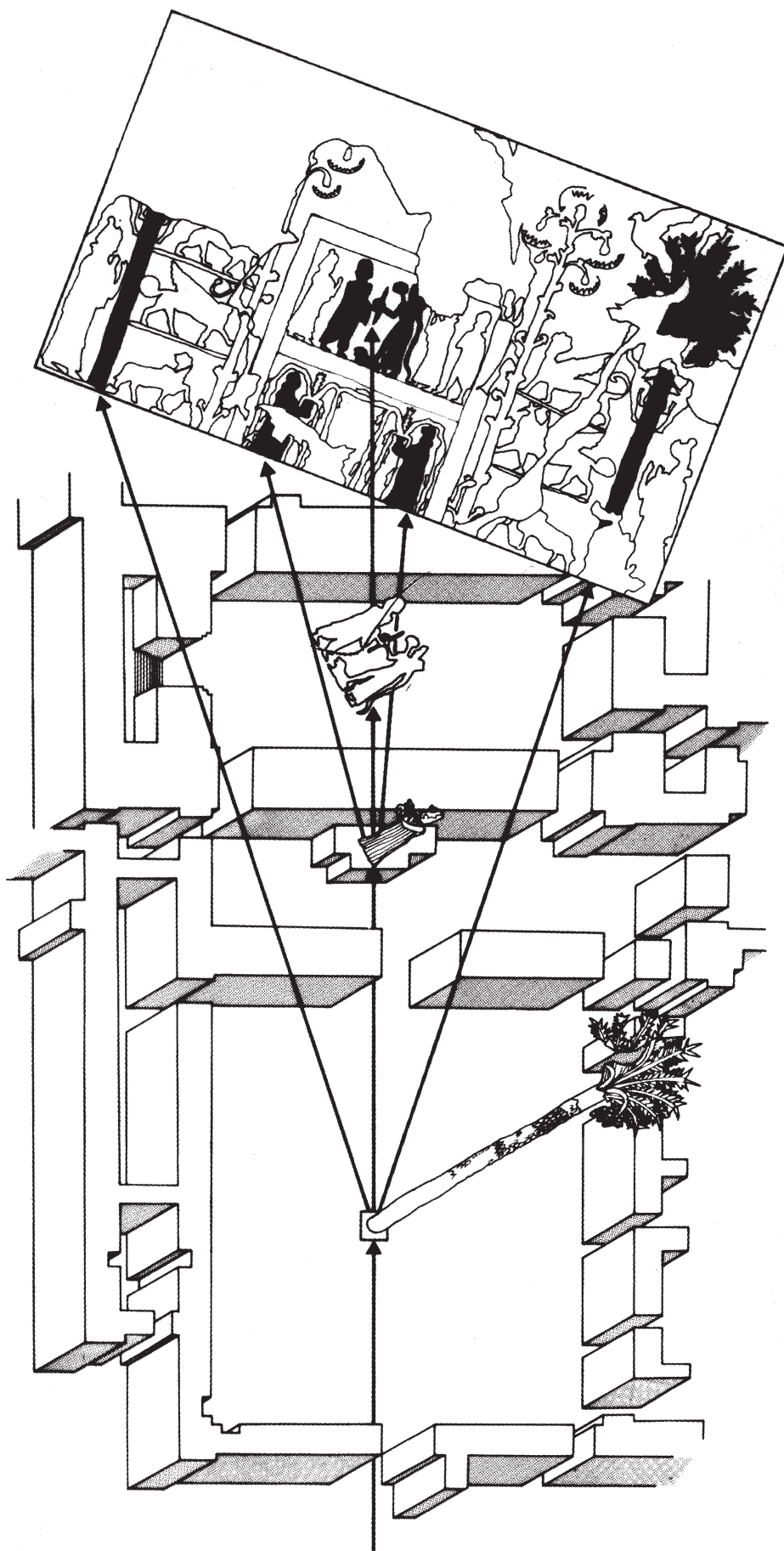


Figure 175: Spatial interpretation of the Painting of the Investiture. The three parts of the official group of the palace – Courtyard of the Palm, vestibule with the statue of the Goddess of the Flowing Waters and the Throne Room – are represented in a progressive fashion to lead the eye from the entrance to beyond the palm tree, across the vestibule and up to the place of meeting with the god and goddess, the Throne Room. Architectural space and pictorial composition come together in this primary place of the royal cult.





Figure 176: Goddess with flower.

### **Terracotta objects**

In the category of popular art, figurines and triads characterise the period (fig. 178). The figurines are not always different from those of the *Shakkanakku* period, except for two series (nude female figurines, masculine divinities seen full-face, masculine personage seen full-face holding an axe and a bird – perhaps a divine, royal or priestly figure –, soldiers in arms, divine couple on either



Figure 177: Goddess holding the vessel of flowing waters (City III).

side of an emblematic pole mounted on a lion, couple drinking with a straw) found in the slaves' quarters of the House of the King and the Women's House, which probably denote northern origins. The triads, clearly of better quality, are stamped reliefs that show a triad of figures standing on a mountain: the goddess Ishtar with a masculine figure on either side. These reliefs are in the same category in which the moulded platters for the royal table found in the palace may be placed (fig. 179).

### **Art in the Middle Assyrian period**

The art expressed in the finds from the tombs is naturally limited, as it appears only among the funerary offerings



Figure 178: Stamped relief, Ishtar between two acolytes on the mountain (City III).

and objects, but it is worthy of mention because of the exceptional quality of some jewellery and because the first glazed pottery appears. In both cases, nothing proves that these objects were made at Mari, which appears to have been at this time a very small centre, even a kind of garrison, the provincial capital being at Dur Katlimu on the Khabur.

### **Conclusion**

Originality, diversity of achievements, artistic ingenuity, these are the dominating features of artistic production in City III at Mari, which can take its place alongside that of City II. Mari should be considered to be one of the great artistic centres of the Syro-Mesopotamian world, a veritable school of art.



Figure 179: Mould for a platter, from the Great Royal Palace (City III).



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## XI. The historical data provided by archaeology

Forty-one excavation campaigns, from 1933 to 2004, have given Mari a place equal to that of the other great centres of the Syro-Mesopotamian world – Susa, Ugarit, Uruk, Babylon and Assur. A mass of new data, not yet thoroughly studied, goes beyond archaeology into the realm of history and provides new information on certain developments. Although the existence of Mari was relatively short, 10 to 12 centuries, it occurred at a time when the advent of the city and of urban life was accompanied by social and economic reorganisation in the Syro-Mesopotamian world, thus ensuring Mari's place in history.

Its place was important for a number of reasons. After the ephemeral Habuba Kabira, Mari is the second city in history truly known through archaeology, and also the second “new” city, whose development could be followed for twelve centuries. The first non-Sumerian city, its creation involved regional modification of the land on a grand scale, with the establishment of an irrigation network and the construction of a navigation canal 120 m long, as well as a derivation canal linked to the river, because the city was established on the Holocene terrace and not beside the river itself. It is the first example of strict urban planning that follows a rigorously circular plan, 1900 m in diameter, which reflects a concept of urban life concerned with protection of the population from flooding by the construction of an embankment and from human hostility by the erection of a strong wall. Mari clearly demonstrates that the creation of an urban centre in this period was not the result of a whim, but that of an economic policy closely associated with a clear understanding of regional characteristics; the goal of this policy was the control of a major trade route for essential commodities as well as the creation of a large-scale metallurgical production centre. In the course of the city's history, its population demonstrated its capacity to maintain an active regional system that ensured the city's

continued existence as well as transforming it, to adapt to new situations, to control its growth for the good of the entire community, and to improve its protection by implementing new defensive concepts.

All these achievements are of the first degree, and lead to reflection on this phase in the history of the Syro-Mesopotamian world, which some consider to have been a period of decline compared to the Uruk period, and to a reorientation of the interpretations made. All this new and often unexpected information implies forces that have so far been unsuspected for the beginning of the third millennium.

There was certainly a break at the end of Uruk IV, but it is necessary to re-evaluate its nature and intensity, as transition is not synonymous with collapse. As the foundation of Mari can be understood only in terms of an economy in which trade played a dominant role, it is imperative for this crucial period that attention not be focused only on the cities of the south or only on the region of contact between the Zagros and the alluvial plain. The whole of the hydrographic network should be taken into consideration, as it ensured the unity and complementarity that linked the economies of the plain with those of the mountains.

When the whole of the basin is considered, and not just this or that part of it, southern Mesopotamia can no longer be considered as the only place where the development of the ferment left by the Uruk period took place and as the exclusive point of departure for the urbanisation that was to develop throughout the basin.

Mari was in no way a city born of agricultural colonisation or military advance, meaningless in the regional context of the period, but clearly the pure product of a will to dominate a trade route between a centre of production and a centre of consumption, as well as to trade metal objects produced at Mari, far from the sources





Figure 180: Letter from Enna-Dagan, king of Mari, to a king of Ebla, from the archives of Ebla (photo kindly provided by P. Matthiae).

of raw materials, into the valley of the Euphrates at the gates of the Babylonian plain. Thus it was necessary to undertake a huge regional project of works to adapt the land to the goals sought. In this light Mari ceases to be a centre of anecdotal or occasional interest to become an expression of the general aptitude of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia to dominate their environment and act upon economic forces. Of course, to supply the food needs of a new concentration of urbanised people, it was necessary to create areas of agriculture and thus an irrigation system; but far from being a primary consideration, this was only a consequence that clearly turned out not to be sufficient, according to the textual evidence at the end of Mari's existence. The men who founded Mari did not limit their vision of the world to the field next to the urban centre, but saw far beyond it into the distance.

This is why the entire articulation of the regions that made up Syro-Mesopotamia at the dawn of the third millennium should be reconfigured. For example, proper place should be given to the discoveries, including texts, made forty years ago in western Syria at Ebla, which have provided historical data on Mari, as well as to those made more than two decades ago in the Hamrin, and to the more recent data from the excavations in the Khabur. The basin should be studied more as a coherent whole that included a

certain regional diversity. Efforts towards comprehension should also be applied to the points of contact and of penetration towards the mountain belt.

Besides the question of the origins of the city at the beginning of the third millennium, Mari should be considered as a true mirror of the situation that prevailed in the Syro-Mesopotamian basin. Of course, Mari was not indispensable to the functioning of the region as a whole, and at certain times the role of this capital of the middle Euphrates valley was weak or non-existent, while the basin as a whole carried on by maintaining links with its northern sources of supply. But it is clear that when Mari was prosperous, the entire basin would have been so. Moreover, the possibility that trade routes were diverted during the third millennium should not be over-estimated, because if new routes had become dominant because of regional crises, why did the fundamental role of Mari not appear to have been modified during the whole of this period?

The context that led to the foundation of the city and enabled its development was always present, at both of the renaissances, each of which was followed by a new period of splendour. The route by water remained dominant for trade in spite of the rise of goods transport by donkey caravans and the beginning of the development of wagon transport. Up to the flowering of the *Shakkanakku* period,

even to the end of their domination, the system always functioned.

Although the Amorite kings attempted to re-establish life and power to Mari, and the thousand-year-old weight of prestige is reflected in the texts, economic power was no longer present. Only the shift of the trade routes towards the foothills of the Taurus can explain that the Euphrates route, although not abandoned, no longer procured the riches of an earlier time. There was also perhaps a modification in the supply centres for copper and tin and of the routes that ensured their diffusion to urban centres. Did Mari maintain the mastery of the working and commerce of metals that had been hers for a thousand years? This is far from certain, and archaeology has not given, for the final period, any vital information on this fundamental activity, known only through the texts.

Reconsideration of the structure of the Syro-Mesopotamian world, in the period poorly named the third Dynasty of Ur, is also a necessity after the re-evaluation of the period of the *Shakkanakku*. Ur certainly dominated the ancient land of Sumer and its power extended to the central plain, perhaps episodically even farther, but Ur-Nammu and his successors did not unify the entire basin under their authority, and the importance of Mari shows that the two hubs shared the whole of the country.

Thus the history of Mesopotamia did not only sway between periods of extreme division and fragmentation of the centres of power and periods when unity appeared to have been an ideal. In fact, a division between two or

three great kingdoms was one of the forms of political organisation known in the second millennium, with the rise of the Old Babylonian empire, and then after 1500. Indeed, this division already existed in the third millennium.

For nearly a millennium, from its foundation to just before the victory of Hammurabi, Mari was the great centre, the capital, of northern Mesopotamia, matched in the south by the domination of Uruk followed by that of Ur. This partition of the Syro-Mesopotamian basin into a northern province rooted in the Mediterranean region and the Anatolian world and a southern province oriented towards Iran and the Gulf, which were united only for short periods of no more than a century under the domination of central Mesopotamia (Akkad then Babylon I), corresponds perfectly to the structure of this large region that linked two exterior hubs, Europe and Asia, by its river basin. In the great Mesopotamian adventure, Mari was the key to the north.

The history of Mari presented here is the result of archaeological studies. It is not the history of kings, conflicts or even people at work in their daily lives as reflected in the texts from the last thirty years of the city's existence. Useful as they are, texts can only inform over the short term, fixed as they are upon a few years, but the history of Mari that has been gleaned from archaeology illuminates for us the major outlines of a state of civilisation, of economic thought, of modes of action and of change over the long term.

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# Glossary

**Amorite:** the name of a group of nomadic tribes who were very active in Mesopotamia at the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennium; they took power in many cities, including Mari, in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BC.

**Anonymous Temples:** the name given by André Parrot to a group of small temples with unknown divinities, situated in the sacred sector at the end of City II (or beginning of City III).

**barcasse:** a term given by André Parrot to the small boat-shaped receptacles closely associated with altars where offerings could be placed and libations poured.

**betyl:** a word of Semitic origin meaning “divine house”; in ancient Syria betyls were standing stones, obviously sacred, which contained the divine power and thus manifested the presence of the god.

**favissa:** a Latin word designating for archaeologists a pit dug under the floor of certain sanctuaries, in which sacred material was buried, separated from everyday use.

**High Terrace:** a place for sacrifices in City III, closely associated with the temple of Lions, the greatest sanctuary of the city in this period.

**Holy Place:** a place for offerings in a Mesopotamian temple.

**kaunakès:** Greek term designating a Near Eastern garment which the Sumerians, men and women, wore in the third millennium in the form of a robe or simply a skirt. It is not known whether these garments were sheepskin, wool cloth hung with tufts or strips, or felt material.

**Massif Rouge:** a high terrace in the middle of the sacred sector of City II, probably intended for sacrificial activities.

**Papahum:** an Akkadian term meaning “vestibule”, which designates the room that precedes a sacred place or the throne room.

**Pcs:** an abbreviation of Palace central space, used by the French team at Mari (Psc, *Palais espace central*) to designate the large space of 16 m by 16 m at the heart of the Sacred Precinct of the palace of City II.

**Sacred Precinct:** the name given by André Parrot to the great sanctuary of the palace of City II. A divinity was worshipped there whose name is unknown but who was the principal god of the city in the period of City II.

**Sahuru:** a term that may designate part of a sanctuary, possibly the entrance.

**Scarlet Ware:** the name given to a polychrome pottery of northern Mesopotamia of the beginning of the third millennium.

**Shakkanakku:** in the Akkadian world of the second half of the 3rd millennium, originally the name of a function conferred by the sovereign. At Mari, it signified a governor named by the Akkadians to exercise power in the conquered city. The name became attached to the dynasty that reconstructed City III.

**souk:** a market, in Arabic.

**tannour:** term used for bread oven in the Near East.

**Very Holy Place:** in a Mesopotamian temple, the location of the divine throne. It is preferable to “cella”, the usual Latin term, which is imprecise and without any relation to the Semitic world.



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# Bibliography

After more than 70 years of work, a bibliography for Mari cannot be exhaustive. I have included excavation reports and retained significant publications that concern the subjects treated in this work in relation to the main directions of research in recent years; thus readers may pursue their investigations on certain subjects that they may have been found to be too briefly discussed in the body of this work.

## Abbreviations

|                 |                                                                                 |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ARM             | Archives Royales de Mari                                                        |
| AEM             | Archives Epistolaires de Mari                                                   |
| MAM             | Mission Archéologique de Mari                                                   |
| <i>M.A.R.I.</i> | Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires, Paris, ERC.                    |
| MDOG            | Mittelungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin                         |
| RAAO            | Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale, PUF.                           |
| IRSA 1971       | Inscriptions Royales de Sumer et d'Akkad; see below, Sollberger and Kupper 1971 |
| LAPO            | Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient; see below, Durand, 1997–2000.          |
| OIP             | Oriental Institute Publications                                                 |

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